

A.KAZANTSEV

AGAINST  
THE  
WIND

My readers know me, an engineer by profession, as the author of the science fiction—*The Blazing Island* and *The Arctic Bridge*.

Recently I published *Northern Pier*, a new novel. It is a dream of tomorrow, a book about people who daringly transform the nature of a rugged region to make life on earth fuller and happier. But before beginning to write it I decided to visit the Arctic. There I knew I would have the opportunity to see the living characters of the future book and get to know the conditions in which they worked and overcame difficulties. I had read so much about it and had longed to go there ever since I was a boy who admired Jack London's strong and dauntless characters.

I sailed to the Arctic on board the *Georgy Sedov*, a ship of legendary fame, which in 1937-40 drifted all the way through the Polar Basin, farther to the north than Nansen's *Fram*.

A. KAZANTSEV

# AGAINST THE WIND

*Short Stories*



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## CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
HELP .	5
THE HALTED WAVE .	20
DISAPPEARING ISLAND	33
LOVE	47
A DUEL	58
AGAINST THE WIND	70
A FIND	86
THE BEAR-CUBS	103
HEXA . . . .	116
A LAUNCH AT SEA . . . . .	134
THE UNTOUCHED TABLE .	146
AN IVORY PLATE .	160
HARD TO PORT! . . . .	171
A RACE IN THE ARCTIC NIGHT .	182



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## HELP

Rock Mouth is a small fishing village. Its few log cottages stand on the sloping bank of a river that is so wide you would think it swollen by a flood. Beyond them rise the cones of Nenets *chooms*. Near the *chooms* we saw sledges, each with a team of six reindeer harnessed fan-like. The surrounding country is tundra, a delusive carpet of green which squelches when you tread on it.

Once the sledge was the only vehicle used in the tundra. In winter a team of four is enough—snow makes pulling easier, my fellow-traveller, who had arrived with me by a land plane, told me.

As soon as we landed he went for news to the chief of the polar station. Baranov's flying boat was to touch down at Rock Mouth on its way back from an ice patrol and take us to Bleak Island.

We heard the distant hum of a motor.

A cross-country car with a covered top was coming over the tundra. Slowly it climbed a hill, then went down into a hollow. There it was again, on a hill crest. It looked like a tiny launch sailing a green sea in a swell.

The car drew near the reindeer teams. Now we could see its wheels cutting into the grassy ground. Its tracks left a broad wet trail behind.

The reindeer did not mind the rumbling monster; they were apparently used to it.

On the edge of the village the car pulled up in front of a cottage. A slim youth in quilted jacket and trousers jumped nimbly out of the cab.

I crossed to the car.

The youth who had alighted first was gone. A thickset man in overalls and a crumpled leather cap was busy with the car. He had lifted its bonnet and bent over the motor every now and again, humming some tune in his moustache.

Suddenly I heard a familiar woman's voice.

"Kuzma Andreyevich! Go and fill it up, then come back for me."

The woman was standing on the steps of the cottage. She looked slender even in her quilted jacket and trousers. A lock of dark hair escaping from under her cap helped me recognize her.

I recalled the group of army surveyors I had met at the front near Petsamo.

Galina Nikolayevna recognized me, too. With both hands stretched out, she came running down the steps.

"You here? Where've you come from? Where are you going?"

"And what are *you* doing here?" I asked, shaking hands with her and gazing into her handsome face, with its softly outlined chin, fine lips, and stern grey eyes already marked by wrinkles.

"I'm a geologist now," she answered.

"And where's your husband?"

"He was killed shortly after you left," she said and turned away.

The mechanic banged down the bonnet. He was looking at me reproachfully.

"But where are you going?" asked Galya, who had regained her calm, turning to me again.

I told her I was flying to Bleak Island to board a ship which would take me to the *Georgy Sedov*.

"I'm going to stay on board the *Sedov* to the end of the navigation season. I'll visit many islands, including some of the northernmost."

Galya was roused.

"What a lucky meeting! Please give my regards to Vanya. He's a wireless operator. Used to work with me in the tundra. Then he made up his mind to leave for the islands. The very northernmost."

We sat on the wooden steps and watched the orange afterglow gathering colour.

I asked Galya questions, glancing at her fine profile, her quilted jacket, her high rubber boots.

She told me the story of her first trip as chief of a geological survey group.

The cross-country car was carrying her over the tundra.

Far ahead of the car ran its long shadow. It would pass the car, glide up a ridge, and then merge with the dark spot beyond.

Galya was sitting next to Kuzma Andreyevich Dobrov, the driver.

In the early days of the trip, she had had a hard time with him.

He did not conceal his resentment. "So I've got a chief now!" he muttered. "This is what all your life and work has earned you, mechanic Dobrov! Now you'll be taught how to drive in the tundra! Next you'll get down to pots and pans."

Galya had actually announced that they were all going to cook meals by turns. Dobrov, too, had to cook. He carried out her order without a word, looking at no one, as though he were ashamed of himself.

"I'll only suggest the general direction by the compass, Kuzma Andreyevich," Galya had said, climbing into the cab, "and as to picking your way in the tundra, you can do that better than I."

Then Dobrov had given his chief a swift glance. They were travelling against the sun and that made them blink.

"So that's how it is. She does know, after all, what a mechanic is worth."

The third member of the group was Vanya, the wireless operator. For him, as for Galya, this trip was the first serious test. He was proud to be in charge of wireless communication.

Unlike Dobrov, he at once recognized the authority of his chief. Perhaps he even showed her too much attention. Rather short of stature, with a freckled face and down just beginning to sprout on his chin, he was highly solicitous for Galya and insisted on cooking in her stead. When Galya said she would not hear of it, he was sincerely hurt.

Still she could not stop him from doing little things for her. He would open a tin of food before Galya could so much as think of it. Her sleeping-bag would be found unrolled before they camped.

One day Vanya read Galya some poetry about the goddess Diana. Overtaking reindeer, Diana raced in the tundra in search of magic treasures she could see hundreds of yards down in the earth.

Galya asked him whether he had ever seen a statue of the goddess. He confessed that he had not. Then she told him that her son would have been nearly Vanya's age if he had lived. But the fact was, she had never had children; at any rate, she could not possibly have had a grown-up son.

Her words stunned Vanya, the more so as they were spoken on the day the wireless failed.

He forgot all else on earth and tried in vain to repair the wireless. He stripped it, then put it together again, resoldered wires, turned knobs, and sighed ruefully. Galya was at pains not to come near him.

"Out here in the Arctic," Dobrov grumbled by way of edifying the others, "everybody must know how to replace

everybody else if necessary. But all *we* can do is cook meals by turns."

"That's true," said Galya, looking him straight in the eyes. "You must absolutely teach me to drive, and I'll teach you geology. As to wireless engineering, we're going to learn that together."

Dobrov twirled his moustache and said nothing.

"Well, Galina Nikolayevna," he said next day, "the wireless is done for. We've got to turn back."

Galya frowned.

"We haven't fulfilled our task yet. You say they'll lose track of us at the base? During the last days the wireless worked by fits and starts anyway. They'll realize that it's out of action and we're going on with our job. That's what we'll do, too."

Dobrov shrugged his shoulders. But he approved of his chief's decision.

Vanya was in despair because of his inefficiency, and Galya was moved to treat him more kindly. She charged him with collecting samples of rock wherever they halted.

For two months now the geological survey group had been roving the tundra. Only occasionally did they come upon reindeer herds being driven closer to the sea and farther away from the unbearable mosquitoes which swarmed from the taiga.

In the last days the group had made discoveries that called for large-scale work, which could perhaps be started before the snow came. Had the wireless been in order Galya would have asked for an additional group with the necessary equipment; but now she herself was compelled to hurry to the base.

The sun hung low above the horizon. Running on ahead, the long shadow of the car seemed to be groping for the way.

Galya thought of her mother, an old teacher, of Khibini, and of the fishing village where she was born.

When geologists had arrived at the site, there had been nothing there but tundra and mountains. Then a remarkable town and factories had sprung up.

At that time Galya looked on the geologists as people who blazed new trails into tomorrow. She decided to become a geologist. When the war broke out she went to the front to defend her homeland. And later, a geologist herself, she came to this northern wilderness where towns would also rise some day.

It was not easy. She was fortunate to have been born in the North, to have been taught by her mother to love work; this helped her a great deal.

The body of the car rocked and tipped on knolls. One moment Galya slid to the door, the next was pitched against Dobrov's shoulder.

He glanced at his chief now and then with friendly concern.

A dark lock of hair escaped from under her cap. The corners of her mouth were lined by weariness. What might she be dreaming of? Perhaps of the asphalt highways of which she had spoken to Dobrov a short while before, or the factories and towns that would rise here, near the places where they had made their discoveries.

How her eyes had shone when she inspected the pit they had dug out last!

Dobrov had jumped down to her. He had listened to her, understanding only part of what she said. Yes, he was sure he wanted to study geology. Forty years was not so old. And the fact that he was a mechanic would make things easier. In the Arctic, people must be able to replace each other. Take Vanya, for one—he was so green and yet nobody could lend him a hand.

Galya was pitched against Dobrov's shoulder again. The car had careened to the left. Dobrov quickly turned the wheel to the right. But the body of the car careened more and more until the car stopped, its wheels skidding. Galya woke up.



"This is what comes of day-dreaming!" cried Dobrov angrily.

Vanya drummed on the partition of the cab.

Galya flung the door open and jumped lightly down on the grass. It squelched under her feet.

The left front wheel had sunk axle-deep in the soggy ground.

Galya ran round the car and bumped into Vanya. He was standing by the left track, almost knee-deep in water.

"Don't rev it up!" he shouted. "You're just digging the track deeper in!"

Pulling out her feet with difficulty, Galya walked round the car. Dobrov leaned out.

"Back up, easy," Galya commanded calmly.

"Hadn't you better climb in, Galina Nikolayevna?" Vanya suggested. "The water might get into your boots."

Galya smiled.

"Get a spade, Vanya."

The motor now roared, now toned down to a hum. The churning wheels were throwing up lumps of sticky mud.

Galya and Vanya, bespattered and besmeared, made vain efforts to help the motor. The car was bogged up to its body now.

"Well, well!" said Dobrov dejectedly, examining the mired tracks. "But still asphalt roads will cross here some day, I'm sure they will."

"This is no time to be talking about paved roads, Kuzma Andreyevich," Vanya put in with a sigh.

Galya frowned.

"Must we wait till the ground freezes? We can't waste time."

"This *is* the time to talk of paved roads," Dobrov countered Vanya's remark and turned to Galya. "We're going to dig up the upper layer on a hummock. It's less than a half-yard to frozen soil. We'll pave our way with frozen 'bricks.'"

Vanya flushed and climbed into the car to get a crow-bar and another spade.

"Galina Nikolayevna! We'll manage it—why are you taking the spade?" he protested.

Galya worked as hard as the two men.

On the northern slope of the hummock they lifted the layer that had thawed up; then they dug on till they reached the permafrost stratum and, cutting out with difficulty chunks of frozen soil, began to carry them into the deep rut made by the tracks.

Three hours later Dobrov climbed into the cab and switched on the motor. The car shook. Its wheels spun one way, then the other, flinging up clods of frozen earth. And then all of a sudden there was a crash and the motor howled as with pain. The wheels stopped.

Dobrov jumped out of the cab, his face pale. He dug himself a hole and crawled under the car.

Galya and Vanya watched him in silence.

At last he clambered out from under the car, soaked to the skin and covered with mud from head to foot.

"Well, Galina Nikolayevna," he said, "we're in a bad mess—the cardan shaft's bust. It's all up now."

Galya turned away so that her companions would not see her face.

She found the situation a desperate one. What was she to say to her subordinates who were waiting for her word? It was all her fault. They ought to have turned back as soon as the wireless broke down. But that would have meant putting off the further exploration for a year. Had she the right to risk it? And was it a very great risk after all? Would anyone at the front have considered such a trip risky? There they would have pushed on on foot.

She turned round swiftly to face Dobrov.

"How far do you think it is to the base, Kuzma Andreyevich?" she asked in a calm voice.

Dobrov did not dare to look his chief in the face.

"Over a hundred and twenty miles, Galina Nikolayevna," he said, dropping his head.

"Vanya, get the provisions ready. We're going on foot," said Galya resolutely.

"On foot?" echoed Vanya, flabbergasted.

They set out.

For a long time they could see the car, tilted helplessly to one side.

Vanya often looked back. Galya did not look back at all. She was leading the way and her rucksack was as heavy as the men's.

Crestfallen Dobrov was following her.

It was hard going. The delusive green carpet was impassable in places. Time and again the three came upon rivulets, lakelets and sloughs.

Galya plodded on untiringly with a manly, springy gait. Tall and wearing quilted trousers, she looked like a slim youth.

They made their brief halts atop of hummocks where it was not so damp.

Next day the sun hid behind straggling clouds. A heavy snow-fall turned the tundra grey.

The three walked on. The snow melted on the ground, but the flakes blinded them and got under their collars. A rough wind rose.

"Over a hundred and twenty miles," Galya thought, terrified. "In the first twenty-four hours we didn't make so much as ten. Why, we had to pull out our feet after almost every step. What's in store ahead? The hardest thing is to control your feelings and show an example. Will my strength last long enough?

"Above all I must see that my step is firm and confident. I mustn't show I'm tired."

Suddenly she gave a joyous cry and turned to her companions, pointing to the nearest ridge.

A reindeer!

The animal stood there as though peering at the oncoming men, and a moment later sped down the slope. More and more reindeer appeared on the ridge, then raced down-

wards in the tracks of the first. As they galloped along their antlers seemed to float above the ground.

A reindeer herd! There must be people near.

The three hastened their steps. The reindeer kept on fleeting past. They were small beasts, reaching no higher than a man's chest.

Galya stopped to admire the ease with which the reindeer swept along.

"A sledge!" shouted Vanya.

A reindeer team of six was coming down the ridge. A Nenets in a deerskin parka was steering with a long pole.

The three waved their arms; the Nenets stopped the sledge and alighted.

"Much good day," he said to Dobrov. "Why go tundra on foot?"

The narrow eyes in his wrinkled face were puckered up in a friendly smile.

"Our car broke," answered Dobrov.

"Oh! Oh!" The Nenets shook his head. "Bad business. Come our *choom*. We treat you. Tell wife put down bag."

"She isn't my wife," said Dobrov. "She's my chief."

"Chief?" said the Nenets, eyeing Galya distrustfully.

It was hard for the beasts to pull four people. So the old Nenets decided to walk and handed his long pole to Dobrov. Dobrov shook his head.

"Steering a sledge is more'n I can do."

"I'll do it," said Galya. "Give me that *khorei*."

The Nenets glanced at her with respect.

An hour later they were seated in the *choom* of the old man who was chairman of a reindeer-breeding collective farm.

"Oh! Oh!" said the old man, shaking his head sadly as he listened to his visitors. "Wireless broke, car broke."

"We ask you very earnestly," said Galya, "to take us to the nearest place where there's a wireless. We want to give notice of ourselves and get help."

"Oh! Oh! Very many miles. So your wireless quite bad shape?"

"Quite," Vanya confirmed. "I'm a wireless operator, but I couldn't repair it."

"You couldn't repair?" echoed the old man.

The fur flap of the *choom* was thrown open, and a woman came in. The old man got busy.

"I slaughtered reindeer," he said. "Now we eat meat. You like raw meat?"

He spoke a few words to the woman, then explained it to his visitors, "Now she will call man we want."

"Please let me cook the meat," Galya begged. "I know very well how to do it."

"Why spoil good meat? As you like. You my guest," said the old man with a shrug.

Galya followed the woman out.

"Not wife?" the old man asked again incredulously. "Woman go tundra alone. Chief? Why she want to cook?"

More Nentsi were coming in. Each of them shook hands with the two men and sat down near them on reindeer hides spread out on the floor. Despite the warmth the newcomers kept their fur parkas on. One of them wore a soldier's greatcoat. He must have returned from the army shortly before.

Galya brought in boiled meat, and the host began to treat his guests to it. The Nentsi ate the food cooked by Galya out of respect for the three.

"We don't eat so," the old man explained. "Cooked meat is spoiled. We eat this way."

Taking out a sharp knife, he picked up a piece of raw meat, bit into it, and cut it off with the knife just short of his lips.

"We've got no vegetables or vitamins," said the Nenets in the greatcoat. "Raw meat protects our people from scurvy."

Vanya looked at the speaker in surprise.

"That's true," Galya corroborated. "Once I had to try it on myself. Raw meat cured me of scurvy."

The old man cast an approving glance at her.

"You use *khorei*, go tundra, know meat. You all right."

Galya seated on her lap a little boy with beady eyes and stiff black hair.

"Why aren't there any older children here?" she asked.

"Went school," replied the old man.

"We now have boarding-schools out here in the tundra," said the wearer of the greatcoat. "The children are already arriving there."

"Vilka will teach there." The old man pointed at the speaker.

Vilka was embarrassed.

"I don't know yet. I haven't yet made my choice."

"You mean after military service?" asked Galya.

"Yes."

"He not come home six years," put in the old man. "Father went, brother went."

"Where did they go?"

"His father Executive Committee chairman. Brother draw pictures."

"My brother is an artist and bone-carver," said Vilka.

"I thought you wife," the old man said again to Galya. "Russian woman not go tundra before. Trader come without wife. He come camp. He eat, drink, trade. Then he want wife!"

"Is it true that you had the custom of offering your wives to your guests?" asked Dobrov.

"We had no such custom!" Vilka protested vehemently. "That's a tale spread by traders. They made poor people give them their wives, then slandered them, saying it was a custom."

"No more trader," said the old man, "no more rich reindeer-breeder. We have kolkhoz. Reindeer common property, but every Nenets has own wife. We now live this way."

"We were going to ask you for help," said Galya, addressing the whole company. "We must radio our whereabouts. Where is the nearest wireless?"

"Far, very far," said the old man, shaking his head. "Reindeer must run long. Mighty far."

"I think the nearest point is where you left your car and wireless," said Vilka all of a sudden.

"But our wireless is no good now!" Vanya burst in.

"I thought so, too. Car near, polar station far. I asked Vilka." The old man nodded at the demobbed soldier.

"So you could show us the way?" Dobrov asked Vilka.

Vilka, a stocky man slow of speech and motion, did not speak at once.

"I'll show you the way," he said after a pause. "I'll try and help you. I'm going to take you to the car."

"To the car?" cried Vanya. "Are you making fun of us?"

Galya raised her hand in a reassuring gesture.

Four cross-country cars were moving over the tundra one after another. There was no road and each car was following its own roadless course, leaving a moist trail behind.

Their long shadows crept over the ground, climbing on hummocks.

The tundra was like a green sea that now threw up the cars upon a crest, now sent them down into a marshy hollow.

As they reached one of the ridges, people in the head car caught sight of a tilted car with a covered top, far ahead.

"There they are at last!" exclaimed the chief of the group, who was travelling in the head car.

A reindeer sledge was racing up to meet the cars.

Galya was steering with a *khorei*.

The head car and the reindeer met in a hollow. Galya jumped down on the wet grass, ran up to the car and gave

a strong, manly handshake to the hand stretched out of the cab.

Standing near the tilted car were Dobrov, embarrassed Vanya and Vilka the Nenets, his greatcoat unbuttoned and showing a bar of decoration ribbons pinned to his tunic.

The chief of the group was the first to greet him.

"How are you, Comrade Vilka? Thanks for helping our people out."

Vilka smiled.

"Don't mention it, Comrade Chief. One condenser was ruptured and the other leaked. I only changed the circuit a bit, and the wireless started working."

"Thank you, Vilka," said Galya. "I suppose I'm thanking you for the thousandth time." Suddenly she threw her arms around the Nenets and kissed him. "Just think, Georgy Il'yich," she said to the chief of the group. "Who could have imagined we'd find such a fine wireless technician out here in the tundra!"

"He's an army wireless operator," the chief of the group remarked significantly. "They claim you, you know," he said to Vilka. "They want you to work at the wireless centre."

"Thank you," answered Vilka with dignity. He was standing calmly before the new-comers, a thickset, deliberate man. "Thank you. Perhaps I'd better wait. I want every Nenets camp and every *choom* to have a wireless. It's got to be done."

"It shall be done, and a lot more. Just get in touch with all those who're back from the army," suggested the chief.

Vanya managed at last to have a word with him in private.

"I'll take a training course," he said in an excited whisper. "Then I'll start for a polar station . . . the farthest of all! Now I know what an Arctic wireless operator must be like." He looked at Vilka.



Galya and I were sitting on the steps of the cottage. The car, which had just refuelled, was coming over from the polar station.

"Vilka didn't teach Vanya alone," she was telling me. "He taught *me* how to control my feelings, how to offer and give help simply and readily. You know, he did put wireless in the *chooms* and now he's chief of shift at the wireless centre. He could hardly read and write before he was called up. Now he's planning further studies. If you see him give him a handshake on my behalf. You may see Vanya the wireless operator, too. Tell him Kuzma Andreyevich and I remember him often. And now, good-bye." She rose. "Dobrov is waiting for me." She shook hands with me. "Look, the fishermen are laying their net."

I looked after the car as it moved away. It now appeared upon a hummock, now dropped out of sight in a hollow. Geologists were on their way to blaze new trails into tomorrow.

There was an orange afterglow on the horizon, which in that season did the duty of night.

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## THE HALTED WAVE

The river reflected the glowing sky, and the water seemed orange-coloured.

Men were busy on the bank, laying a fishing-net.

My fellow-traveller Netayev, a young seaman who was on his way to the *Georgy Sedov* to replace the third mate taken ill, had gone to see the chief of the polar station and did not come back for a long time.

I thought I would watch the fishermen at work and went down to them.

Several men were dragging the net along the bank, while their mates, in oilskin overalls, waded chest-deep through the ice-cold water.

The net was pulled out on to the sand. The fish wriggled in the meshes like quicksilver.

I had never imagined that fish of so many kinds could be caught in the Far North. There was smelt and dorse, and even plaice which I had thought was only found in south seas. Sometimes the net brought in a puny, ugly fish—the sea-devil—which looks like a wood-goblin. The fishermen threw it back into the water with disgust.

At last Netayev returned. He was trying to look calm, but his blue eyes kept shifting uneasily.

“There’s trouble on Guessed Island,” he said in a level tone that obviously cost him an effort.

The fishermen walked over to us. One or two nimble fish

leapt out of the net and, flouncing spasmodically, reached the water.

"Two men from the polar station are missing: mechanic Gordeyev and wireless operator Panov," said Netayev.

"What do you mean?" an old fisherman with a greyish-yellow moustache asked anxiously.

"Yesterday they started out to hunt seal and haven't been heard of since."

"Oh, what a misfortune!" cried someone.

"Did anybody search for them?" asked someone else.

"Yes. Followed their ski-tracks, but the tracks broke off at the edge of the ice."

"Must've drifted away on a floe," said the old man and took off his cap. His hair was grizzly, with a touch of yellow.

"And what's the weather like over there?" asked a young fisherman in a greatcoat.

"Rough."

"That would mean the gale broke off the floe."

"Were there just two of them?"

"Yes. And a dog. No food, though."

"Oh, what a misfortune!" said the old man sorrowfully. "The Arctic—it's so hard and changeable. The boys must've lost their lives. I suppose they were young?"

"Yes."

"Are you waiting for Baranov?" the demobbed soldier asked us.

"Uh-huh."

"If only Baranov was here—"

"That's it, if he was here!" those around us agreed.

We walked to the station. I was thinking of the missing men. It was more than six hundred miles to Guessed Island. The fishermen had taken the news of the misfortune on the far-off island just as if it had happened in their own village.

The wireless operator at the station gave us the latest news. The dog had just come back to Guessed Island—wet and alone. It had a knife wound in its neck.

What had happened on the floe while it drifted in the gale along the island? Who could tell?

A plane came into view in the sky. A mere speck at first, it then grew into a beautiful soaring bird. The bird skimmed over the water, furrowing the smooth orange surface with its breast. Two grey-crested waves followed it.

The two roaring propellers of the flying boat looked like shining disks. Its wings were much higher than its body, which was as shapely as a sea-gull's. Two floats had appeared on the tips of the wings; one of them was already frothing the water.

The boat wheeled round and began to draw near. Trestle bridges led to the river from petrol tanks on the bank. Men in top-boots and quilted jackets were getting ready a hose.

"Why do we fill up here and not on Bleak Island?" asked the broad-shouldered pilot as he stepped ashore.

He was Matvei Baranov.

The chief of the polar station handed him a radiogram by way of reply. The flyer glanced at us, nodded, and began to read the message.

He had large features, with deep lines at the corners of his mouth, and bushy eyebrows. His face might have looked stern but for the dimple on his chin, which somehow softened it.

Like all pilots he often screwed up his eyes, straining them, and tiny puckers fanned out from their corners.

"And I'd thought I'd spend the night here and bring down the humidity at your refreshment-bar," he said to the chief of the station with a smile.

The other, a veteran pilot who had long before given up flying, shook his head.

"I'm thinking of something else. Why, you've been flying fourteen hours on end."

"We must check the engines," said Baranov and turned to his companion who was taking some bags out of a boat. "Put 'em back, Kostya, we'll be taking off right away!"

"Taking off? And how about filling up?"

"Can't you see the tanks?"

"Those aren't for the sort of filling I mean." Kostya's eyes twinkled mischievously.

Compared with Baranov, Kostya looked small and agile. This is what the chief of the port told us about him.

During the war Kostya was a war pilot. He was reprimanded more than once for reckless flying and finally was sent to iron-handed Baranov for correction. They became friendly. One evening Kostya went to bed and Baranov, who was going to a party, could not wake him up. When Kostya discovered that Baranov had gone without him he took a human skeleton in the laboratory of the school where their unit was stationed and tucked it under his friend's blanket. Coming back, the enraged Baranov pulled Kostya out of bed.

Once Baranov had to parachute from his damaged plane; to help his friend, Kostya belly-landed his own plane in a marshy tundra. The wireless was out of order and the two flyers were unable to signal their whereabouts. They spent a whole week levelling the ground for a take-off and straightening out the bent propeller, and succeeded after all in reaching their airfield where they had been considered dead. . . .

The boat headed for the flying craft. The mechanics got to work on the engines. Baranov came up, greeted us, and offered a smoke. Children from the fishing village surrounded us. One of them, a swarthy Nenets dressed in a tiny but real parka, was probably feeling hot.

I could guess what message the radiogram carried, and was watching Baranov with interest. He cast frequent glances at the flying boat being prepared for the flight, but his face was inscrutable. He cracked jokes with the children, then held out his leather cigarette-case to them. The children gasped in amazement and shook their heads. Baranov laughed.

"This is what always happens. The cigarettes are interesting as long as they're out of reach. All right, now, take them as souvenirs!"

Still the children took none. Baranov turned to us.

"I've got two naughty boys like these. Each of them I've presented with a silver cigarette-case. I'm sure they aren't going to smoke. It's the forbidden fruit that is sweet. Got a radiogram from them yesterday. They want a bear-cub. But I'll bring 'em a piece of strange coal. It was found on an island. Looks like coal, but is lighter. Why are you standing here?" he asked suddenly in a different tone. "Where's your luggage? We can't waste time."

As we went for our luggage, we managed to learn a thing or two about Baranov.

He had been an Arctic flyer for nearly fifteen years. In winter he lived with his family in Moscow where he tested aircraft, but with the beginning of the Arctic navigation season he flew north and did not return until navigation was over. He dreamt of night flights in the polar regions in winter and helped in making them regular.

When we came back the flying boat was being refuelled.

Baranov, tall and heavy, was talking to a man from the station, his feet in high dog-skin boots planted wide apart.

"So it won't die down before three days, will it?" we heard him say. "Is the sea rough?"

"Happy landings!" said the man as Baranov took leave.

Baranov disappeared inside the flying boat. Soon Neta-yeve and I climbed in, too, and found ourselves in a roomy cabin with a semicircular glass top.

A launch steamed up to tow the boat to the middle of the river.

Kostya put his head out of the cockpit, winked at us, and was gone again.

The flying boat floated slowly along in the wake of the launch. The river was surprisingly calm. It still reflected the golden afterglow. In those latitudes, nights are golden in August.

Through the glass top of the cabin, we could see the launch drawing away to the bank.

The engines roared. It seemed as if the flying boat were about to dash forward and take off. At last!

A moment later we lost sight of the launch. Fishermen's houses and the tiny figures of fishermen on the bank were gliding rapidly past. Then we saw ahead of us a smooth expanse of water and far away, the vague outline of the opposite bank.

The boat was wheeling round. Perhaps Baranov was choosing the direction in which to take off. Once again we sighted the fishermen's houses, the polar station, the launch.

The boat was turning round and round. Why? Was anything wrong?

Kostya emerged from the cockpit.

"We're waltzing," he told us. "Warming up the engines, you know. A land plane doesn't move an inch while warming up its engines, but we must dance. It's more fun this way, though!"

We spun many more rounds in that peculiar dance. The powerful engines were being checked for the last time, the propellers roaring at an even pitch.

And suddenly the boat hurtled forward. The houses dropped behind. Waves rose and screened the windows of the cabin. We felt like having submerged. White foam sped past the panes.

Unexpectedly the waves vanished. The zooming boat headed for the open sea.

"The *Sukhumi*," said Netayev.

I saw a toy-like steamship lying in the roads.

It was a pleasure to view the land below. On our way north, the plane had flown above the clouds all the time.

Soon the village, the mouth of the river and the steamship passed out of sight.

"Mountains!" Netayev shouted.

I looked back. On the horizon behind us rose the hazy sky-line of cloud-like mountains.

"It's the Urals," said Netayev right in my ear.

"The Urals?" I queried in astonishment. "How far are they?"

"Sixty-five miles or so."

So we saw them from a distance of sixty-five miles. It seemed incredible.

The bay fell behind. A strange landscape spread below. Could it be the sea with drifting ice-floes?

Thousands of round and oblong spots—dark-green, blue, brown, or white—were scattered over a greenish expanse. Some of them wound like coloured ribbons.

"Tundra," said Netayev.

So that was it. The colour spots were water—innumerable pools, lakes, rivulets, and rivers, their hue depending on the kind of soil and the depth of the reservoir.

The peninsula was lost to view behind us. We were flying above the polar sea.

There they were, the floes—small white spots strewn over the water. I was struck by the unusual geometric pattern, something of a hatching, that covered the water.

Baranov stepped out to invite us to a snack in the "living cabin."

"That's waves," he said, meaning the mysterious hatching.

The walls of the cabin were fitted out with double tiers of berths. We sat down on the lower berths. A board suspended from the ceiling was lowered. It served as a table.

Smoked omul is a surprisingly tasty and delicate fish.

"I've got instructions to fly to Guessed Island," said Baranov. "We must spot the floe with the men."

"Then why aren't we going north?" asked Netayev.

Baranov looked up at him.

"There's a gale off Guessed Island," he said. "I'll land you on Bleak Island."



Netayev and I glanced at each other. Why did Baranov have to land us? Wouldn't it be simpler to take us to Guessed Island?

Without explaining anything more, Baranov went to relieve Kostya who feared that the omul might be eaten up without his help.

"The floe with the men—we're just going to take a look at it from up here," he told us as he stowed away the fish. "The sea is rough. We can't land. It isn't easy to land even in the bay of Bleak Island. That choppy sea, damn it!"

Bleak Island came in sight. We described a circle above it. Ships rode at anchor in the bay which separated the island from the mainland. A few houses and a wireless mast clung to the greyish-blue rocks. The port appeared across the bay.

We began to descend rapidly. The waves were white-crested. Kostya peered anxiously through the window.

Suddenly there was a jolt. Netayev was pitched back and hit the partition. A grey-crested wave rushed past the window. And then we had another jolt.

"That was a nice shake-up, all right!" said Kostya in a voice that sounded happy for no obvious reason, and disappeared in the companion-way.

Through the half-open door we caught a glimpse of the faces of the air mechanic and the wireless operator.

The floor of the cabin was sinking away under our feet.

"A regular roll," said Netayev with satisfaction.

I looked out. We were sailing across a ruffled bay. Basalt rocks, two two-storey houses, a tall wireless mast, and a wind motor were swinging up and down ahead.

"The sea's choppy enough," remarked Netayev.

I recalled Guessed Island.

"I wonder what it's like over there," said Netayev as if having guessed my thought.

A launch came alongside and started bobbing on the waves. Netayev handed me pieces of our luggage.

The launch pulled away shorewards, dipping its bow.

The spray doused us from head to foot. We did not go down into the cabin but watched the flying boat wheel round as it made ready to take off.

Now it swept ahead with outspread wings, tossing on the waves. Through the howl of the wind and the roar of the sea, we heard the rumble of its engines. Hopping from crest to crest, the powerful craft was moving farther and farther away. A few seconds later I sighted a strip of the grey sky between its body and the waves.

A gale was raging somewhere. An ice-floe broken off from an island was afloat in a misty sea, with two men stranded on it.

"Baranov's going to drop them some food and tell us where they are," we were told on the shore. "The *Sedov* will hurry to their rescue, but—"

"Will it be hard to spot them in the open sea?"

"Very. Almost impossible."

The *Sedov* was in the north. Netayev and I were to reach her by some ship going our way. If she moved off to Guessed Island, we would miss her.

We roamed Bleak Island. Snow lay here and there at the foot of the rocks. Moss and low polar grass grew between stones. I found a few tiny, strong-scented flowers. Lemmings scurried back and forth underfoot; they look like rats but are mottled. Neat little paths trodden smooth linked their holes.

We walked over to the polar station.

We were introduced to Grachov who had set up a record in a contest of Arctic wireless operators. He managed to receive by ear and type out an incredible number of words per minute—nearly twice as many as an average typist can.

At that moment he was keeping in touch with Guessed Island. There was a frown on his large, almost square face with prominent cheek-bones.

"Baranov's passed over the island. He's on his way here," he said, speaking over his shoulder to Vilka, the Nenets chief of shift, who had just come in.

Vilka crossed to the telephone. As I looked at him I recalled what Galya had told me in Rock Mouth.

Netayev and I had had no chance to sleep in Rock Mouth. Since we took off from Arkhangelsk we had not slept for more than twenty-four hours, but we could not think of sleep just yet. Every message sent in by Baranov was immediately broadcast all over the island.

Two hours after we landed, the entire population of Bleak Island was gathered on the shore. Things like that happen only when cargoes arrive.

With heads tipped back, people were peering at the sky. There were loud comments.

"Nobody but Matvei Baranov could've done it!"

"I won't believe it till I've seen it."

"Did you see the way he hit the water when he landed in the bay awhile ago?"

"That's just why I can't believe it."

"I received the radiogram myself," said Grachov weightily.

"He's coming! There he comes!"

"Will he manage to land? Perhaps he's got something broken."

"You don't mean Baranov, do you?"

"Yes—he may have damaged something."

Netayev had a pair of fine binoculars. I saw the flying boat through them. It was coming down hurriedly, without having described the customary circle.

Soon it was just above the waves. Now it grazed them, bounced as if thrown up, then alighted again and sped across the waves, raising spray.

"He's landed!" people cried in the crowd.

The flying boat roared into the little bay.

People ran to the jetty, their feet sinking in the soggy ground.

A launch was tearing along to meet the craft.

Before long several men ascended the jetty. Kostya was among them, gesticulating vigorously.

"Who's wireless operator Panov here? Which of you is mechanic Gordeyev?" people asked.

"There he goes, in a fur jacket, that tall one with the rifle. It's Gordeyev. We wintered on Russian Island together."

"Did he move to Guessed Island from there?"

"Yes."

"And now he's on Bleak Island all at once. He hardly thought of it two days ago."

"He had no hope two hours ago."

The excited crowd parted to make way.

The two rescued men, in fur jackets and with rifles slung over their shoulders, were received with open arms. Netayev and I walked up to shake hands with them.

Their haggard faces were at once embarrassed and joyful. Panov, a little snub-nosed chap, apparently spending his first winter in the Arctic, was almost bewildered by the hearty welcome. Gordeyev, tall and gaunt, was unwinding a red woollen scarf from his neck.

"We just went there to shoot seal," he was telling someone, "to feed the dogs. We didn't mean to stay long. But how shall we get back to Guessed Island now?"

Both were taken to the refreshment-bar for a treat.

"We had our fill of smoked omul," Panov tried to excuse himself.

We elbowed our way to Kostya. With shining eyes, he was relating the story of the rescue.

"We sighted them as we flew over the area around the island. Baranov thought that since the dog had come back three hours before, they must be close by, somewhere near the island. They hadn't drifted far."

Grachov came up.

"D'you know why they stabbed the dog?" he asked.

Everyone turned round to look at him.

"They wanted it to go to the polar station, so that people there'd know they were near. The dog had to swim to get

ashore. But it wouldn't go, so they stabbed it to scare it into running away."

"I was going to tell you that myself," Kostya interrupted him. "They slashed its neck with a knife as a way of letting people know they were alive and near. Well, Baranov used that return address to find them."

"But how did you manage to pick 'em up?" asked Netayev.

Kostya gave him a mocking look.

"Remember that grand jolt in the bay, when the sea was choppy?"

Netayev rubbed his neck.

"That was why Baranov dropped you. He didn't want to take chances while you were aboard. He'd made up his mind to land on a rough sea."

"I can't make that out at all," Grachov put in. "We'd better ask Baranov."

Kostya was indignant.

"He won't even talk of it," he said. "Don't you know him? *I'll* tell you how he did it. Ever seen the sea from a plane when it's rough? It's sort of hatched all over."

"Yes, I noticed that," I answered.

"That's waves. They run in rows. Each line is a wave-crest. If a crest like that hits the boat, it's done for. At landing speed that'd be the end of it."

"But how did Baranov do it?"

"At first I couldn't make it out myself. I saw we were going just above the waves. They were grey with foam and—kind of ragged. Baranov tried to steer along the crest. He did it, too. Then I knew what he was up to. I had a feeling that the waves had stopped short. We were flying over the sea at the same speed as the waves—flying along a wave, I mean. Just imagine you're running aslant along a railway platform, keeping opposite the door of a moving carriage. It was the same way with us. We flew athwart the sea, keeping above one and the same wave. And the wave was as high as a railway embankment. If there'd been less roll

we'd never have managed to land. He landed smack on a crest."

"A magician!"

"We landed on the crest without a jolt. It was afterwards that the jolts came, when we'd lost speed and slipped off the wave. My, what a jolting it was, what a tossing! I thought the boat would be smashed to bits. But it wasn't and we picked up the men. They'd had a hard time on the floe. They couldn't believe we'd landed.... And this is how we took off: Baranov taxied to two ice-fields north of the island. The seas weren't so bad between them. So we were able to take off."

"Now we'll catch up with the *Sedov*!" Netayev rejoiced.

Then we saw Baranov. Tall and broad-shouldered, he was lighting a cigarette, shielding it with the flap of his jacket. He flung away the match, turned round, and held out the familiar leather cigarette-case.

"Have a smoke?" he said, smiling.

Everybody took a cigarette, including myself who did not smoke.

Incidentally, nobody lighted his cigarette—because of the wind, or for some other reason.

I keep flyer Baranov's cigarette as a souvenir of the Arctic.

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## DISAPPEARING ISLAND

A mong my Arctic relics there is a piece of coal—of the kind flyer Baranov once told me about. I dug it out of a black seam laid bare by a landslide. Polarniks\* call it coal, but it is very light. On its black surface you can distinguish the structure of timber. It is coal without any doubt, but its origin is wrapped in mystery. The island on which it was discovered is one of sand deposited by the sea and it emerged not so long ago, comparatively speaking. Nothing has, or ever could have, grown on it. And yet there is that strange coal.

I first heard about it aboard the *Belomorkanal*. Netayev and I had boarded her when she was sailing to and fro in Bleak Island Bay. It seemed as though the captain could not make up his mind to put to sea.

Netayev told me they were checking the ship's magnetic instruments.

"It may take them long, I'm afraid," he said with a sigh. "I wonder if we'll catch up with the *Sedov*."

But the *Belomorkanal* sailed without delay on Monday, August 26.

At lunch we met the captain. Clean-shaven, with fine features and firm lines at the mouth, he was dressed with seaman-like smartness, and his manner was polite and obliging.

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\* A polarnik is any member of a polar expedition, an explorer of polar regions, a person engaged in work at a polar station.—*Tr.*

"I think the *Sedov* will still be landing cargo at Disappearing Island when we come alongside," he said. "You can board her right there. The sea isn't very rough."

"She's an interesting ship, is the *Sedov*," put in the first mate. He was a shortish, untalkative man with a weather-beaten face and attentive eyes.

"Isn't she?" said I. "A ship of legendary renown! She drifted her way along the whole polar basin, north of the route followed by the famed Nansen's ship, the *Fram*."

The first mate smiled.

"That was a noteworthy, an outstanding occurrence, to be sure. But the *Sedov* performs quite a few feats that go unnoticed. You'll see that when you've sailed awhile on board her. She does for the Arctic the duty of internal transport. She's always plying from island to island. Nobody seems to take notice of her, but she's quietly scored more than one record."

"Did you ever sail on her?"

"Yes. I did my navigation training aboard her. Many discoveries have been made by those who sailed on her. But she looks so plain. You'll see that for yourself, though, when we come up to Disappearing Island."

"Why do you call it 'Disappearing'? That isn't its real name, is it?"

"We gave it that name after a certain trip. I was sailing on the *Sedov* at that time. I can tell you about the island. And about the coal that was found on it."

The first mate told us about the *Sedov*'s crew, about the professor who took an interest in the unusual coal, and about romantic Sannikov Land.

At the time there were aboard the *Sedov* passengers bound for various polar stations, and a Moscow professor. He was a lively, active old man who made everybody's acquaintance, asked questions, argued with people, and was eager to know everything. He won general affection. Everyone



knew he was on his way to an island which he wanted to explore.

Wearing a costume quite unsuited for the North, he would walk about on deck and speak now to one, now to another of the Komsomol members, who were going to some island or other.

"Tell me, young man, are you glad to be in the Arctic?" he questioned a freckled lad who was gazing avidly at the sea.

"I don't mind. I like it," answered the lad reluctantly.

"And may I ask in what capacity you're going to work hereabouts?"

"I'm a meteorologist. Did a training course."

"The meteorologist's work is that of a scientist!" declared the professor.

The lad looked up in surprise and flushed.

"And what about the seascape? How do you like it?" the old man went on to ask.

"Seascape's all right. There isn't much ice, though, and you don't see any bears, either," replied the lad gravely as he looked at the few ice-floes lit by the sun and shaped grotesquely by the water.

"Not much ice? But these are the first floes you're seeing. They *must* thrill you! I can see from your face I'm right. And soon we'll arrive at the island you're bound for. I wonder what it's like."

"Oh, nothing special about it. I'd much rather have gone to some other one."

"How can you say that? Your island comes first in our list. We must help the polarniks there."

"I know. Only I wanted to go to the New Siberian Islands."

"Why?"

The lad—his name was Grisha—roused up.

"Have you ever heard about Sannikov Land?" he asked.

"You mean those distant mountains north of the New Siberian Islands? The ones industrialist Sannikov sighted

from Cauldron Island in 1810? That's pure imagination. There is no such land. Soviet flyers and seamen have proved that more than once."

Grisha was transformed. A restless glint came into his eyes, and his freckles instantly disappeared in a deep flush.

"No, they haven't! After Sannikov, people saw birds fly north from the New Siberian Islands. Why should birds fly out into the open sea? And besides, the Onkiloks—that's a tribe—went off somewhere to the last man. Towards Sannikov Land, they say. I'm quite sure there is a land there."

The professor smiled.

"But science needs something more than conviction."

Grisha would not surrender.

"Now take Obruchev. He's an academician and he wrote a whole book about Sannikov Land! It says in his book that Sannikov Land has a peculiar climate on account of volcanoes, it's warm there—"

"Warm?" echoed the professor.

"—and you may come across all kinds of prehistoric animals," Grisha went on with rapture. "Perhaps even pithecanthropi."

"But, my friend, it was science fiction Vladimir Afanasyevich wrote, pure and simple."

"Next winter I'll ask to be transferred to the New Siberian Islands."

"Want to discover Sannikov Land?"

"Yes, and I will! I'm going to unravel its mystery, if I can do no more."

"I like daring. And I envy you—sincerely. I wouldn't take the chance."

"But you came here, and by air, too."

"I'm a geologist, my friend, don't you see? Each day of my life I've walked an average of five thousand paces with these rheumatic feet of mine." The professor hid a smile in his moustache.

"Is it true you've discovered coal on the island, Sergei Nikanorovich?" asked Grisha.

"Come, now, my dear boy, that's idle talk. It was polar-niks who did it. I, on the contrary, argued that that was impossible. Why, it's an island of sand, sea-made. Nothing ever grew on it. How could there be any mineral coal there? But it seems that there *is* some coal there, or rather, traces of it. I've come here for the express purpose of finding out my error."

"You'll know soon."

"Yes," the old man agreed.

The island came into view next morning. A huge grey pillar was advancing from it towards the ship. People in the Arctic call the phenomenon a snow "charge"—a snow-storm moving at lightning speed.

The "charge" swept aboard the *Sedov* and shut out the island. It grew dim all around, as if the ship had been put in a giant bag. But the snow-storm raced on. The captain came out on deck and showed the professor a distress radiogram he had just received from ashore:

"Heavy breakers. Landing impossible. Shore crumbling. House threatened with collapse. Doing what we can."

"Breakers?" asked the astonished professor. "And that could stop us?"

"It isn't much of a problem for seamen to make some far-away island. But landing—"

The Party organizer invited all those on board to the saloon. Some of them had singlets or quilted jackets on, others were in full dress. There was not room enough. Those who came late had to hug the walls, or sit on the floor. The gathering comprised both crew members and passengers—people bound for polar stations. The professor sat on a bench near the wall, scanning the faces with his bright, impatient eyes.

After the meeting he said, rubbing his hands, "I like debate that is brief: 'Breakers? Can't land? Good. We will land.'"

Men pulled on oilskin overalls. The launch *Petushok* was being lowered. It hung in mid air, held by ropes slung

under its bottom, and a minute later was dancing on the waves. It was followed by a flat-bottomed kungas, capacious but heavy and unwieldy.

Men started down a rope ladder. It was difficult, with the waves tossing the kungas up and down. An attempt was made to bar the professor from the ladder.

"I can't stay!" he protested hotly. "It is my aim to visit the island. You may lower me with ropes, after all!"

It was done with the help of a jib.

The *Petushok* made for the island, towing the kungas. The high, bluff shore was drawing near. The polar-station house rose on it like a besieged medieval fortress. Clouds of foam seethed below.

The launch raced on, lashed by the waves. The second mate, who was steering, knew that it would be child's play for the sea to smash the flimsy craft to chips against the shore.

He was manoeuvring with the waves. At first he played the simpleton and let the waves toy with him, but just before reaching the shore he put the *Petushok* about. The launch suddenly turned to the waves its bow instead of its stern, and charged them with boyish daring.

While the heavy kungas was putting about after the launch, the waves struck at it ceaselessly with their shaggy paws. The briny billows burst into clouds of spray, blinding the men and knocking them down.

The launch drew the tow-line taut; now the kungas was between the launch and the shore, with its stern turned shorewards. The second mate was retreating step by step and the kungas was imperceptibly approaching the shore. At a suitable moment a sailor cast a line ashore from the kungas. Polarniks caught it up and tugged at it to keep the craft from turning its side to the breakers. But the breakers tossed up the kungas and dashed it down on the rocks.

It was all the professor and Grisha could do to keep aboard the kungas by clinging to a bollard on the bow. Both looked bewildered. The men on the shore and the

launch's crew were pulling at the line in a vain effort to hold the kungas. It turned its side to the breakers just the same and heeled. The water surged aboard.

The passengers jumped overboard and waded to the shore. The breakers overtook them and pounded at their backs.

Grisha stood in the water, tugging at the professor's sleeve. At last the professor jumped, too. His breath was taken away. The sea was colder than ice. Dazed and breathless, he staggered to the crunching shingle.

The breakers pitched the kungas after him and overturned it.

The half-choked professor spat out in disgust. Huge shaggy dogs hopped about him, trying to lick his face. The polarniks joyfully welcomed the arrivals. They stood on a narrow strip of land at the base of the bluff.

From there the sea could be seen settling upon the island. It sapped the shore—frozen sand now thawing up—gnawed at it and melted it like sugar. And the shore overhung the sea in a heavy mass that might topple down any moment.

Walking up and down the shingle, washed clean by the surf, the professor examined the lumps of sand broken off, and rubbed his hands. Then he threw back his head and looked up. He saw the house on the bluff.

"The shore crumbled here yesterday," said a bearded polarnik in a thin, youthful tenor. "Now the bluff starts right at the steps of our house. But you must all dry your clothes."

"Dry our clothes? What about the house?" asked Grisha.

"Do you hear the roar? The shore crumbles here every moment."

"Then we must save the house!" said Grisha excitedly. "Our clothes'll dry as we do it."

The new-comers began to climb up in a hurry, as if summoned by an alarm-bell.

Up there they saw a fine house, built some ten years earlier. In it each polarnik had a private room. And now it

was poised above the sea, threatening to hurtle down. Once it had stood more than a hundred yards from the shore. Now the shore was hard by it. This had been discovered by the polarniks, who had returned to the island the year before. They had lived undisturbed throughout the winter, but as soon as the thaw had set in the sea had started the assault afresh. They had had to abandon the house after taking out of it all they could.

A deep winding cleft stretched over the ground. It crept under the house and came out on the other side.

"Stop! Stop!" shouted the professor, his hand pressed to his heart. "What are you up to, you crazy fellows? Don't you dare to cross that cleft!"

The men halted for a moment.

"The whole island consists of sand held fast by ice!" cried the professor. "It was piled up by the sea and held together by the cold. The frozen layer is now thawing, the sea is washing away the island, the shore is crumbling. Don't dare to step across the cleft!"

"But the house'll be lost if we don't!" said Grisha.

"We must save it. Get a tractor. We're going to tie a rope to the house!"

Grisha glanced at the professor.

"Please, Sergei Nikanorovich, see that it doesn't hit you. There's no tractor here."

A beam fell from above. It raised a pillar of dust. The professor stared in perplexity now at the house, now at the beam.

Grisha was already on the roof, ripping off boards. The polarniks had marked every board and every beam beforehand, so that they could easily reassemble the house elsewhere.

Work was in full swing.

Boards crashed down one after another. Rafters creaked. Axes gleamed. Heavy crow-bars were put to use.

"Step lively, boys! Come on! Come on!"

It was as fast a job as could be. The kind done during a

fire. The men shifted huge beams and threw them down. The dust settled on their moist faces.

"Heave ho! Heave ho! Lively, now!"

A screaming, furious wind lashed at their faces and strained to tear the men down from the log frame. The sea roared below, but no one heeded it. The men tore up the logs one by one and threw them away from the shore.

"Look out!"

The professor helped the men to drag the logs across the cleft.

Soon the ceiling was taken apart. The house, laid open, showed its rooms which had been so cosy but a short while before.

At last the job was finished. The polarniks took their visitors, who were exhausted and soiled beyond measure, to the poultry-house converted into a dwelling.

The professor had put on someone's jacket. Gay and talkative, he sat at the table bantering Grisha, whom he assured that his face was tattooed like an Onkilok warrior's. The wife of the chief of the polar station, a quiet but active young woman who was also the local cook, led Grisha to the mirror, then silently handed him a pailful of hot water and sent him to the bath cabin. True, the others also needed a bath, but Grisha was staying on the island and so she had to take care of him.

It could not be helped. Grisha had to comply.

The hostess ladled more of the steaming borshch into the plates, saying again and again, "Please have some more. I hope you like it."

"I'll say they know how to make borshch on this island!"

After dinner the professor sat down near the poultry-house in a short sheepskin coat and felt boots. Two huge huskies—Lokhtak, the team-leader, and Belukha, the undisputed head of the dog pack—fawned upon him.

"Lokhtak is a bear-baiter," said the bearded polarnik. "He takes on a bear all alone or together with Belukha. They attack the beast from two sides and take turns to di-

vert its attention till you come along with a rifle. Once Lokhtak had a close shave. The bullet went right through the bear and hit the dog's shoulder-blade. Lokhtak was a long time getting over it. But he's as keen on bear-baiting as ever."

The professor was surprised at the friendliness which the two terrible dogs showed towards strangers. The polarnik said that in the North dogs look on all men as friends. It is the beasts, such as the bear or the seal, that are their enemies.

Lokhtak ran off and lay down near the bluff, not far from the bath cabin.

"He's watching for seal. When a seal sticks out its head he'll start barking to bring on a hunter."

"That reminds me of another kind of hunt—for coal. Show me the way to your deposits, will you? Those logs made me forget why I'd covered several thousand miles to get here."

"Let's go down, Sergei Nikanorovich, and look at the fresh bluff. Most likely we'll find something new there."

"Good. I'd like to see remnants of vegetation that has never existed here."

"We've been using coal all winter," said the polarnik modestly.

Suddenly Lokhtak barked.

"What's that? A seal?" asked the startled professor.

Barking in alarm, Lokhtak darted about the bath cabin which stood not far from the demolished dwelling. Suddenly he dashed away. There was a subdued rumble.

"A landslide!" cried the bearded polarnik in a shrill voice.

That part of the shore where the house had stood awhile before was gone—it had probably slumped down just at the cleft.

The little bath cabin rocked. The shock sent the professor staggering against the wall.

There came a rolling crash, like an artillery salvo.

The door swung open. Out ran Grisha, naked and



lathered. He was steaming. His bare feet left marks on the snow. In the twinkling of an eye, he covered the distance between the bath cabin and the poultry-house and disappeared in it. Lokhtak chased him, barking in surprise. He had never seen naked people.

The professor burst into boisterous laughter, and tears rolled down his cheeks.

"He's sure to discover a new land! Take my word for it," he said, choking with mirth.

A few minutes later he went down with the bearded polarnik. Where the shore had overhung the sea a huge pile of frozen sand rose now. The sea was washing away the sand. In a few hours it would begin to sap the shore again. So far the waves could not reach the fresh bluff.

The polarnik pointed to some black veins in the sheer wall.

"Coal?" muttered the professor incredulously. "Impossible! I don't believe it."

He walked up to the wall and began to break off black pieces. The veins, sandwiched between layers of sand, ran parallel to each other.

The professor weighed one of the pieces in his hand and tossed it up several times. It felt lighter than a piece of dry wood. The professor beamed.

"It's samovars, my dear, that this sort of coal would be good for."

The polarnik looked at the professor, puzzled.

"Over in Siberia where I was born, samovars are fed with charcoal," he said.

"Precisely," the professor agreed, in a tone full of meaning. "Come on, let's take a stroll along the shore."

They walked on silently for a while.

"Ha!" cried the professor. "Here's the answer to the mystery of your coal!" He poked with his foot a log polished smooth by the sea, with rounded ends. It lay close to the edge of the water.

"Flotsam?" asked the astonished polarnik.

"Of course!" The professor smiled. "What's accumulated on this island here *is* remnants of vegetation that never grew on it. I'd been cudgelling my brains to guess where coal had come from to this alluvial island. Now I know. It has floated over!"

"What do you mean?"

"For centuries the great Siberian rivers brought to the sea the trunks of trees that had fallen into the water. The trunks were carried to these latitudes. The waves washed them ashore and the sand covered them up. The timber covered with sand became carbonized. True, carbonization didn't proceed in the same conditions as on the mainland. That's why the coal here looks rather like charcoal. Centuries passed. Under the pressure of the waves the island rose higher and higher, raising the seams of coal with it."

"We must shovel up the coal, or else the sea will carry it away."

"Right you are! Don't let it wash away what it once brought here. It's excellent fuel. There's only very little of it here, and there couldn't be more, because the island's so tiny. But you'll have enough to see you through the winter."

The professor squatted down and began to prod the bared seam, humming a tune in his greying moustache. He was in high spirits.

"Sergei Nikanorovich!" Wearing a fur coat that was too big for him, Grisha squatted beside the professor and added in an excited whisper, "A discovery!"

"Yes, you may call it that. 'Flotsam' coal has never been described yet. It's been discovered on this shore here."

"And I made it in the bath cabin—"

The professor turned to him in surprise.

"In the bath cabin? A discovery?"

"I may be wrong, Sergei Nikanorovich, but I don't think I am. When the cabin shook, I at once imagined the shore

being slashed off as with a knife. This island shrinks twenty to thirty yards a year, doesn't it?"

"Yes."

"Then what's going to happen in a few score years? This island will disappear?"

"It will. But don't be upset. The sea will wash up a new one elsewhere. An island like this rose in the Laptev Sea recently."

"But then, since islands can disappear, there might've been a Sannikov Land, too. In that case Sannikov did see it, and geese did fly to it, and the Onkiloks migrated to it. It did exist, then it was no more. It was a disappearing island like this one!"

The youth was gazing at the professor with shining eyes.

"That's interesting—'flotsam' coal on a disappearing island," said the professor after a long pause. "I admire you, Grisha!"

Soon the professor left for Moscow, having promised to mention in his new book Grisha's hypothesis about Sannikov Land.

The first mate, who had told us this story, was standing on the captain's bridge.

"There it is, Disappearing Island," he said, handing me his binoculars. "You can make out the *Sedov* against the shore."

I gazed at the mysterious land which had once risen above the sea and was now dissolving in it. It was an oblong island several miles in length and some three miles in width. I visited it. Scanty grass grows on it in patches. The sandy ground gives way under your feet.

I saw the shore tumble into the sea. The cut showed black veins of "flotsam" coal. I managed to bring a piece of it to Moscow.

As I strolled about the shore I thought of Sannikov Land and tried to guess how many decades more the island would be there.

"You can fortify the shore and prevent it from thawing up," Grisha, now meteorologist at the polar station, said to me, glowing with enthusiasm. "Sannikov Land may have disappeared, but now not a single foot of Soviet soil will disappear if we don't want it to. You see, the coal here is interesting stuff for the scientists," he added.

Grisha saw me to the shore where the *Petushok* was waiting for us.

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## LOVE

The ladder was lowered. From the gangway of the *Belomorkanal* I stepped for the first time on board the launch *Petushok*, of which I had heard from the first mate. The launch was to take us to the ice-breaker *Georgy Sedov*.

In front of the *Sedov*'s storm-ladder, I waited for a wave to throw up the launch and give me a chance to grab a rung of the rope ladder. The *Sedov* was much smaller than the *Belomorkanal*.

I managed to climb aboard after Netayev. The *Sedov* lacked the polish of the larger ship, but then she looked so homely.

We were met by a spare middle-aged seaman with grey temples, wearing an oilskin cape.

"May I see the captain?" Netayev asked him. "I've been appointed his third mate."

"I am the captain," said the seaman quietly. "My name is Boris Yefimovich." He smiled affably.

The third mate's cabin was ready to receive Netayev. I was about to share it with him, but Boris Yefimovich, who was bustling happily, would not hear of it and put me up in the saloon adjoining his own cabin.

I lived next to the captain for several months. He never closed the door of his cabin. Often, at night or by day, I could see him go to bed for a brief spell, but being always on the alert, he never allowed himself the luxury of undress-

ing. Most of his time he spent on the bridge. He was an accomplished Arctic navigator who knew the ways of ice and wind. Sometimes he pored over ice-patrol charts and chose a circuitous route to avoid ice, but sometimes he rushed to it as to a friend. This happened whenever the sea ran wild and set the ship rolling, which Boris Yefimovich hated. He was very anxious for his kungases and the *Petushok*. Their loss would have amounted to a failure of the whole Arctic voyage, because no island could be reached without them.

We were bound for Thrifty Island.

Boris Yefimovich was a fine accordion-player. One day his music charmed me into forgetting where we were. Suddenly the ship shook from bow to stern. The captain flung aside the accordion.

"What is he doing?" he shouted in anger and hurried out to the bridge.

I followed him. There was ice all around us—the ship had just sailed into it.

It was the first time I saw such a mass of ice. The immense ice-field, broken up by wind and sea, stretched away beyond the horizon.

So this was where the ice had retreated to, the ice which, at the remote glacial epoch, had dominated the earth and slid down to the plains of Europe. Here it was now, pushed back by the sun's warmth but not undone!

Powerful ice-floes heaved slowly about us. The ice-field seemed to breathe, its weight crushing the seas.

Once ice-fields like this had turned back foreign explorers, who had declared the Northern Sea Route impassable. Yet here was Boris Yefimovich, a Soviet seaman, who had sailed along it more than once.

"How can you go at it with her stem like that?" he said, taking Netayev to task. "Remember this once and for all: you mustn't break ice yourself but must call me. Don't you see she's old? Now we'll have to check all her rivets!"

"But this is an ice-breaker," Netayev protested meekly, burning with shame. "She cracked the floe so easily."

"An ice-breaker! Why, she's nearly my age! We've got to spare her. We must pick our way between floes. Here, look. Hard to starboard! That's it, squeeze it back with her side, push it. Hard to port! Stop. Astern. Full speed ahead. Now hit it."

The sea seethed overboard. Chunks of small floes shattered by the ship sank and popped up again, as though dazed. The ship broke through, shaking all over. A fresh floe, split by her stem, fell apart, overturned and went down.

"Hard to port!" commanded the captain in a crisp voice.

The helmsman spun the wheel.

"Look sharp!" the captain shouted at him now and then. "Quick. Harder to port!"

The docile ship dodged a floe and sailed into a passage that Boris Yefimovich felt was there.

Boris Yefimovich was fond of telling stories about seamen and polarniks, and was wonderful at it, too.

Usually he began with some unexpected comment.

One day, having stuffed his pipe with "Golden Fleece," he filled the cabin with fragrant smoke, and said, "It's only aboard the *Sedov* that you come across people going in opposite directions. You wonder how this can be? It's quite simple. She sails tirelessly from island to island, delivers provisions, coal and equipment, and shifts people at polar stations. And so it happens that she picks up polarniks from some islands to take them to the Big Land\* while carrying other polarniks the other way. As a result some of her passengers are sailing to the Arctic while the others are returning from there. They take up neighbouring cabins, and occasionally this leads to tangles."

We realized that Boris Yefimovich felt like telling us a story, so we asked him for it.

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\* The mainland.—*Tr.*

He consented readily and screwed up his eyes, as if peering far ahead. A pleasant smile, somewhat sly, lit up his weather-beaten, wrinkled face.

"The *Sedov* was making a routine tour of the islands. We had a girl of twenty or so aboard. It was her first Arctic trip—she'd signed on for three years. She'd finished a seven-year school at a collective farm and it had been her pet idea to travel far, to enjoy the romance of the North, so she'd studied meteorology in Moscow. She was small and well-set. Brimming with health. Her hair was cut short as after an illness. She'd done it purposely, to show she didn't care for any foolishness in the Far North. Well, on board the ship she met a polarnik. He was a famous wireless operator. Everybody knows him in the Arctic. Grachov by name.

"Masha met Grachov, who was on his way to the Big Land after spending several years at a polar station, and she saw him as an Arctic hero. Of course, *he* didn't at all think he was a hero. In fact, he was a staid and quiet young man, but—"

I recalled Grachov's tall form, his square face with the deep wrinkles, and his even, deliberate voice.

"—is there anyone who can't be won by a woman's friendly attention?"

"They strolled on deck together and were seen by all. They didn't seem to think anything of it, but people made fun at their expense.

"Now I must say that the two lovers didn't at all feel like fun. You see, they were sailing on the same ship, but going in opposite directions.

"Masha was to stay for three years on Dreary Island, and Grachov was going home for a rest. Who could tell when they'd have a chance to meet again?"

"I used to look at those two passengers of mine and shake my head.

"One day Grachov walked into my cabin. His face was set and his lips were pressed tight.



"‘Can you spare me a moment, Boris Yefimovich?’ he says. ‘What can I do for you, Grigory Ivanovich?’ said I. ‘Could you tell me, Boris Yefimovich, how much a day’s food costs on the *Sedov*?’

"‘Why not? I called my second mate—he keeps the ship’s books. He made his calculations and told the amount to Grachov. Grachov carefully put it down in his note-book.

"‘Now please tell me, Boris Yefimovich, how much is the passage on the *Sedov*?’

"‘I was surprised. I couldn’t make out what he was driving at. But he was a serious man who wouldn’t ask idle questions. My second mate told him that, too. The fact is, polarniks never pay anything for their passage or meals. All that is provided free of charge under their contracts.

"‘Would you by any chance know the price of an air trip from Moscow to Bleak Island via Arkhangelsk?’ he says. ‘That costs a lot of money,’ I told him.

"‘I happened to know the price. He jotted it down in his note-book, thanked my second mate and myself, and walked out.

"‘Next day he came again. For some reason he looked embarrassed. I offered him some cognac, but he wouldn’t have any.

"‘Boris Yefimovich, it’s you I want to ask for something. Do you think you could lend me two hundred and sixty rubles? I could wire it to you in a month, when I’m back on the Big Land.’

"‘I was amazed. I knew that, during the several winters he’d passed out here in the Arctic, he must have piled up a nice sum of money. But he’s a man you can’t refuse anything.

"‘Why two hundred and sixty? Take three hundred,’ I said. ‘No,’ he says, ‘two hundred and sixty is enough.’

"‘He took the money with thanks and went.

"‘We hove to off Dreary Island where Masha was to land. Vasily Vasilyevich Skhodov was chief there. He’s a well-known polarnik, a stern man, but a good manager at that,

and a square dealer. It was to his station that Masha had been appointed.

"I went ashore to see Skhodov. Masha went with me in the launch. Grachov started for the shore, too. I thought he just wanted to see the girl off. Well, I said to myself, here's a man who's lost his heart in good earnest.

"I must tell you that the chief of a polar station has many functions to perform. Grachov, too, knew that.

"Shortly after I walked into Skhodov's office, along come Masha and Grachov.

"Grachov said they'd decided to register their matrimony in due form and wanted Comrade Skhodov, chief of the polar station, to do it as an official registrar.

"I praised Grachov in my mind. Only I felt sorry for Masha because she'd have to part with him right away for a long time.

"As I said, Skhodov is a dry and stern man. His face and figure fit in with his nature. He's wiry, with hollow cheeks and grey eyes, and he seldom smiles.

"He got out his books, asked those he called 'the parties contracting wedlock' for their identification papers, checked the papers thoroughly and, well, wedded them, that is, had them sign their names, then gave each of the newlyweds a firm handshake, and his eyes at once filled with warmth.

"I knew all about Skhodov. He had buried his whole family—his wife and his son, a boy of ten—on a far-off island. That was long ago. Life in the Arctic was hard at the time and some people couldn't bear up under it. Since then Skhodov had become gloomy. Most likely he thought the death of his dear ones was his fault. Still he wouldn't give up the Arctic. He loves these parts.

"Skhodov congratulated the young couple and told Masha he'd show her to her room as soon as he'd finished his talk with me.

"She walked up to his desk, with eyes cast down.

"‘Comrade Skhodov,’ she said, ‘I’m now Comrade Grachov’s wife and can’t stay on the island for family reasons.’

"Skhodov sat back. His clenched fists lay on the desk and he had a sullen look.

"Then Grachov stepped forward.

"‘Don’t misunderstand us, Vasily Vasilyevich. You know I’ve lived in the Arctic for the last six years. And this is the first time I’m in love. Please let my wife go with me! We’ll come back afterwards. As regards the expenditure on Masha—the trip money, the price of her flight from Moscow to Bleak Island via Arkhangelsk, her passage on the *Sedov* and her meals during the voyage—I’m repaying you all that. Most of it by a transfer from my savings bank and the rest in cash. That’ll be two hundred and sixty rubles.’

"Grachov put on Skhodov’s desk the money and a telegraphic order to his savings bank.

"Masha stood there looking down. Grachov was red with excitement. And Skhodov—you’d have said he’d turned into stone.

"At last he spoke up in a hollow, jerky voice. ‘What’s the meaning of this, now?’ he says. ‘Would you be offering me a ransom for your wife?’

"Grachov’s square face went crimson. But he checked himself and said in a calm, clear voice, ‘It isn’t a ransom, Comrade Skhodov. I’m repaying the state for the outlay it’s made and ask you to cancel the contract with my wife because—’ he stopped short.

"‘Do you really imagine it’s just a matter of money, Comrade Grachov?’ says Skhodov icily, lashing Grachov with his words. ‘Don’t you, an experienced polarnik, know that if your wife doesn’t stay here, the station will be left without a meteorologist?’

"‘But try to understand, Vasily Vasilyevich!’ Grachov pleaded. ‘Don’t you see this is a matter of human happiness? I’ve never spared myself, I’ve given myself up to the Arctic, body and soul. Masha won’t spare herself,

either. Only give us a chance to start our married life, don't part us just yet!"

"He sounded so sincere I felt heartily sorry for them.

" 'The polar station on Dreary Island cannot do without a meteorologist,' Skhodov declared bluntly.

"Then Masha looked up, smiling, and the smile made her face handsome.

" 'So we'll ask the meteorologist you've got now to stay here another year. He couldn't refuse, could he?'

"There was so much selfishness and naïveté in her words that you couldn't have heard them without a smile.

"Skhodov was taken aback, he frowned worse than before and muttered, 'That's up to him. See if you can talk him into it.'

"The Grachovs went at once. Skhodov angrily thrust into a drawer the money and the telegram which he himself would have to transmit to the savings bank, locked the drawer, and said to me, 'Meteorologist Yurovsky has just recovered from a severe illness. He's weak. I've got no doctor here on the island and Yurovsky will never consent to stay for another year.'

"I pictured to myself Yurovsky, who must have his things packed and ready and his pockets full of letters to the Big Land, and then those two who suddenly made their request, thinking that nothing mattered on earth but their happiness.

" 'Yurovsky won't consent, not for the world,' said Skhodov. 'I know he won't. It was on account of his illness that I asked for a substitute to be sent here.'

"As a captain I often have to look into the affairs of my passengers, but now—what could I do now? I could only look on.

"Suddenly the newlyweds came back, beaming like the Arctic sun in April.

" 'He's willing!' Grachov announced.

" 'He's such a dear young man . . . such a wonderful comrade!' says Masha. 'I gave him a kiss. His name's Zhenya.'

"Skhodov went crimson with fury, but said nothing. When the 'lucky' couple had left he said to me, 'Captain, you must help me. I know what human happiness means, but I know just as well what a man's life means. Yurovsky won't survive if he stays. Nobody knows that but me. He seems to have a kinder heart than I imagined, but he has no right to stay!'

"We talked it over. I thought of a plan and we decided to try it.

"I walked out of Skhodov's office. Masha and Grachov came up to me. 'Won't you congratulate us, Boris Yefimovich?' says Masha. 'We're so happy!'

"I said coldly, 'Can't do it, Maria Fyodorovna, because you're an Arctic deserter.'

"Grachov scowled at me. Masha turned pale.

"'You came here to fight the severe Arctic nature like a hero and serve your country, but instead you got busy settling your own affairs.'

"'But mayn't I—' Grachov cut in,—'after so many years—mayn't I think of my own self for once?'

"'Yes, you may, Grigory Ivanovich, because you've earned it. But I wouldn't be sure about the young lady here who hasn't yet had her cheeks frozen!'

"They were going to explain something, but I said to Masha, 'Now you're no longer a polarnik but a passenger like any other.'

"She was hurt.

"I went back to the ship, found the Party organizer and suggested that we make it an 'all hands' job to land the cargo.

"My assistant for political work was genuinely surprised. 'Do you mean all the seamen and passengers to take part in it?' 'I mean all polarniks,' I said. 'But the polar station is a small one,' he says, 'and so's the cargo. We could handle the job without help.'

"I revealed him my plan.

"We started the job. All my passengers readily consented to lend a hand to the crew.

"Work got under way at the landing. Not a single person stayed away from the job. Skhodov and I, too, offered ourselves to carry sacks and boxes ashore. It's a custom with us in the Arctic. Even our cook with his little skipper's beard came running from the galley to 'toss over' a couple of sacks of coal.

"The men walked up in single file to the kungas where heavy sacks were loaded on their backs. The polarniks caught the sacks by the ears and hurried away up the shore. Up there they emptied the sacks. A black pile grew up in no time. The men went back to the water to grab fresh sacks and hurry away again. They worked cheerfully, bandying jokes.

" 'Come on, now!'

" 'Run along!'

" 'Which sack is that? The eleventh? I'm taking my twelfth!'

" 'Polarniks, don't lag behind us seamen!'

" 'Step lively yourselves, sailors!'

"I went down to the kungas for my next sack and ran into Grachov. He was carrying a sack, his face grimy with coal-dust. All you could see was the whites of his eyes glaring. Then a little figure passed me. It was Masha.

" 'Heave one on my back!' she cried. 'Never mind my size!'

"Two seamen swung up a sack, but I stopped them and said to Masha, 'I'm sorry, only polarniks are at work here. No outsiders allowed.'

"She was dumbfounded and just stared at me, and the seamen chuckled. Someone else took the sack they'd picked up for her.

" 'What do you mean, outsiders?' asked Masha. 'Don't you see I want to help?' 'Please go to your cabin,' said I. 'You're a passenger who's paid her fare. We have no right to put you to work.'

"She turned away to hide her tears and walked off. The seamen grinned.

"Grachov came back for a fresh sack.

" 'What's the matter, Masha?' he says.

"But she ran away.

"Afterwards I saw her sitting on a rock, looking at the surf. I wondered what she was thinking about.

"That evening my assistant gathered the seamen and polarniks in the officers' saloon. He announced that it was to be an evening of reminiscences. Anyone was welcome to tell some interesting story of life in the Arctic.

"I was sitting in my cabin when somebody knocked. I knew it was Masha.

"She'd been crying.

" 'Boris Yefimovich,' she says, 'they won't admit me.' 'Admit you where?' 'Why, to the saloon. Am I a leper or something that I may not even listen?' 'Well, that's pushing it too far,' I said as I kept back a smile, and took her to the saloon.

"It was packed chock-full. But a seat was found for Masha. Then I saw Grachov come in, moody and frowning.

"My assistant said, 'Well, who's going to tell us his story?' and narrowed his eyes at Katya, one of our renowned polarniks."

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## A DUEL

“**K**atya was young, although she was considered an ‘old polarnik.’ Like the men she wore a dark single-breasted jacket with bright buttons and a fur cap. Her tresses were gathered and pinned on the back of her head. She had straight eyebrows, with a vertical fold between them that would have made her face stern but for the dimples on her cheeks, which gave her a youthful look.

“‘Yekaterina Alexeyevna—our Katya, I mean—is a wireless operator and meteorologist, and also a mechanic and cook,’ said my assistant. ‘When you live at a small station in the Arctic, you’ve got to be a Jack of all trades. Katya isn’t a bad hunter, either. How many bear-skins do you have to your credit, Katya? Eleven? Well, there you are. She fights a bear single-handed. I’m sure she can tell us a lot.’

“Katya smiled.

“‘Tell us about some exploit of yours,’ one of the polarniks begged her.

“‘I really don’t know what exploit to tell you about,’ she said in a deep voice. ‘I haven’t performed any exploits. But if you care to know what regular fear is like with us women, I’m willing to tell you a story.’

“The polarniks glanced at each other.

“‘It may make you men laugh to hear it, but listen just the same. Perhaps it’ll remind you.’



"Katya got up to sit closer to us. She talked like one who'd gone through many trials. She was fairly small of stature, but sturdily built."

"I was a very young girl when I came here," she began leisurely. "I finished the seven-year school in my village and worked on the collective farm for a year. But all the time I longed to go somewhere—somewhere under the northern lights. Only I had no idea what those lights were like. One winter night they could be seen in my native parts, near Ryazan, but I missed the sight. We girls were at a party that night. I just couldn't forgive myself for missing it, and I took it into my head to go north."

"My parents didn't want me to go at first, but afterwards they gave in. They thought I was headstrong. But I'm not so headstrong after all—just firm. In short, I took a course in meteorology. One day I tried to tell my girl friends what a meteorologist is supposed to do. He has to watch the weather, I told them, by weathercocks and thermometers. Some of the boys started to make fun of such easy work. They couldn't imagine what it is like to go out every four hours—day or night, in frosty weather or in a blizzard—and take down the readings of the instruments with frozen fingers. And that without ever missing your time!

"After I'd finished my training I was sent to a small station on Cape Curse in the Arctic."

"There were four of us on that cape. Three young men and myself. We were all Komsomol members and dreamed of exploits, and as regards love we at once tabooed it. It wasn't love we were after, out in the Arctic. Anyway, the boys were all right. Kept their word."

"True, a year after, I married Alyosha just the same, but for a whole year he'd never dared to breathe a word about it."

"Alyosha was a handsome young man with blue eyes and he used to go out with his coat unbuttoned in any cold. On the Big Land he'd always suffered from tonsillitis, and he

got rid of it by going about in an unbuttoned coat. He never fell ill while we were together. He works in Dark Bay now. I'm going back to him with our little son, after my holidays.

"The boys had more energy than they could use, and I didn't like to lag behind them. We set up groups to study English, music, and singing. We also had a sports group. All the four of us joined each group. The only group I didn't join was the chess group. Women aren't much good at chess, you know.

"We closely watched life on the Big Land. The Stakhanov movement had just started. Alyosha wrote a poem about it.

"But Misha, who was chief of the station, said writing poetry on the Stakhanov movement wasn't enough, he said we must become Stakhanovites ourselves. Kolya, a tall and skinny lad, liked to make fun of everything. He started teasing Misha. How were *we* to become Stakhanovites? What 'untapped resources' did *we* have? You can't send in more weather forecasts or radiograms than required. So Kolya recommended that I cook two dinners a day (I was both meteorologist and cook at the station) and said he undertook to eat them.

"Still Misha insisted that we could and should do more than we did.

"He suggested that we build a hydrological station on the ice that covered the strait, so as to take at regular intervals samples of sea-water from various depths and determine its salinity, temperature, and so on. Nobody was doing that kind of research in our area, though it was very desirable. It would enable us to determine undercurrents, and we could also try to solve mysteries of the sea depths.

"We jumped at the idea. Besides doing our planned work we were going to make scientific observations. We'd peep into the depths of the sea, if only with one eye!

"Misha suggested that we cut a hole in the ice, far from the shore, build a cabin over it and live in it by turns.

Those of us who stayed at the station undertook to perform the duties of the one in the cabin, in addition to their own duties.

"No sooner said than done. The boys picked a spot some ten miles off shore, where the sea was deep enough, and there cut a hole in the ice. I helped them do it. We set up a cabin of ice and snow over the hole. It was as good as any. Two of us worked out there on the ice, and the other two had their hands full at the station.

"When everything was ready we radioed all about it to our chief on the mainland and got permission to go ahead.

"And right away we had a dispute as to who was to start work in the cabin. Misha claimed the privilege as chief of the station, but we told him it was extra work, so he'd better keep quiet as chief. Alyosha proposed a chess tournament to settle the dispute. Well, I gave them a piece of my mind. I said though I couldn't play chess that was no reason why I shouldn't be the first to do the hardest job.

"Kolya thought we should draw lots. We did, and it fell to my lot to go on duty first.

"Alyosha wanted to go instead of me, of course. I said no. He asked permission to see me off at least. I said I wasn't going home from a party, and started to get ready.

"I put on my warmest clothes and took my rifle. At the time I was just learning to shoot, but still I was already a good marksman. Then I said good-bye to the boys. Alyosha had to take care of the cooking in my stead—he was replacing me both in the kitchen and at the meteorological instruments outside.

"He saw me off as far as the instruments. It was time to take the readings and I couldn't send him away.

"Our dogs followed us.

"They brought us both joy and sorrow. We were fond of them, those powerful, shaggy beasts, but it was hard to feed them. Our food stores were under strict control, we had no right to spend them on dogs. We should've shot seal and laid in their meat during the summer. But it was

autumn when we arrived; besides, we didn't quite know yet how to hunt seal. The boys managed to hit only two seal and fished out only one of them. The dogs ate an awful lot, and we had to share our rations with them, but of course we couldn't give them their fill. They were always staring at us with hungry eyes. The boys hoped to shoot a polar bear, but bears didn't show up in our neighbourhood, and seal were out of the question in winter-time.

"It was all Alyosha could do to call the dogs back.

"I looked after him for a long time. It was full moon and I could see far. Alyosha kept waving his cap at me. I shouted to warn him that he might get his ears frozen.

"I walked down the shore and made for our snow cabin across the ice-field. I knew my way, but to be on the safe side I went by the stars. It was Mishka who'd taught me the trick.

"As I walked away from the shore it was lost to view, and the space around me was moonlit and white. I stopped to look at the ice, as if I'd never seen it before.

"I was all alone in that wilderness. It was dead still. It'd have cheered me up had it at least rung in my ears. But it didn't—I might as well have been deaf. I even felt scared, as if I were on the moon or some other dead planet. So still. . . . And that deathlike gleam. . . .

"I felt so weak, so small I could've cried. First of all I thought of Alyosha. When we were last going back to the station from the cabin I had felt nothing of the sort. That's what solitude does to you!

"I shouted to raise my spirits. But my voice was lost as if in a heap of cotton.

"It was the scare of my life. Gladly would I have shouted again, but there was a lump in my throat. No sound came out of it, just as in a dream. It was so still all around me and the moonshine so eerie. I wished at least some shadow would scurry past.

"I felt I couldn't walk on. Might as well turn back and run for it. But what I had to run away from, that I didn't

know myself. It's just that way children run out of a dark house or shed in a cold sweat.

"Suddenly I heard a crackle. It'd been so still at first as though I could no longer hear at all—and now that crackle. It was slight, as of sparks flying a long way off.

"I thought I must be going crazy because I'd begun to imagine things. All my pride was gone in a jiffy. I wished I could call Alyosha, but I'd walked so far away.

"And the crackling went on and on, sticking to the same note. When I strained my ear, it was as if I heard nothing, but as soon as I stopped listening there it was again—a sort of ringing or moaning.

"The sound scared me out of my wits, I turned back and ran. Then I stopped and tried to pull myself together. What was I going to tell the boys? They'd laugh at me!

"I forced myself to think of the job I was out to do. We had to find out if the water near the bottom was fresh or briny, and where the waters of the great Siberian rivers that empty into the Arctic Ocean flowed to. Those waters are warmer than the briny waters coming from near the pole. If only we could use those warm waters somehow so that the Arctic seas wouldn't freeze. There's the Barents Sea, which never freezes thanks to the Gulf Stream.

"As I thought about all that I looked at the ice around me. How wonderful it would be to melt it so that Soviet ships could sail here in winter, too. Soviet people are sure to do that, they're going to transform the North.

"I made myself turn to the sea, then I closed my eyes so as not to see the moonlight. I thought about sleep-walkers—moonshine affects nervous people, doesn't it?

"And I made up my mind to go on, even with my eyes shut. I walked on like one blind, with outstretched arms, and I didn't open my eyes because I was afraid.

"Suddenly I stumbled and fell. I hurt my knee badly and that brought tears to my eyes. Tears are such a great comfort!

"I began to wipe my tears, but my eye-lashes had frozen together. I had to thaw them up with my fingers. That helped me recover a bit from my scare.

"Now I walked on with my eyes open. But I was still afraid to look right or left, and thought that I was a poor transformer of northern nature since it scared me so.

"It was this thought that urged me onwards. I made myself go on.

"Afterwards I lived in the Arctic for many years. Blizzards overtook me in the tundra and I had to hold out through gales, too, but never again did I feel the way I felt that time, out there on the moonlit ice.

"I urged myself on, all the way to the snow cabin, but I think it'd have been easier for me to drag along the carcass of a polar bear.

"At last I walked into the cabin and lighted the lamp. I sat down on a snow stool and cried a little. Then the whole thing seemed so funny to me. A fine polarnik and Komsomol member you are, I said to myself.

"Everything in the cabin was made of snow—the couch with the sleeping-bag Alyosha and I had brought, the table, and the stool near it.

"I took down my knapsack and started to make myself at home. My rifle I put down next to the lamp. I didn't care to think of how I was to get back.

"I decided to begin my work right away and take the first sample of water from the bottom.

"The hole we had cut was covered with a thin film of ice. I cleared it and got the instrument ready.

"I walked up to the hole, bent over it, and back I jumped!

"I couldn't believe my eyes. There was a human face staring at me from under the water. I could even make out its features: its nose and mouth, and its big eyes, so attentive. That face was coming up to my own. I felt like screaming as I stared back at it. So I *was* imagining things.

"The face was rising higher and higher. I clenched my teeth to keep them from chattering. You'd have said a moustached man with awfully big eyes was coming up to me out of the water.

"The face was getting clearer and clearer, as though coming out of a haze. It had two huge, almost round eyes and a moustache—yes, a regular moustache! They kept coming up, those big eyes, big and kind of curious. Staring at me, too.

"I reached for my rifle, but just then I realized it was a seal. The nasty thing!

"All at once I looked on the sea monster from a different angle.

"It was a seal, and that meant seal meat. Had the boys been here, they'd have made sure it didn't slip. Why, the dogs were starved.

"Should I shoot? But it'd go down and I'd be unable to fish it out. How was I to lure it out, then?

"I'd been told by many polarniks that there's no animal half so curious as the seal. They say somebody played a gramophone near an ice-hole, and a seal came out to see what it was. But what was I to do? I had no gramophone. How was I to rouse the seal's curiosity?

"I brought my face close to the water and moved it away, doing it again and again. Let the seal take an interest in my person, I said to myself. I unplaited my tresses and shook them over the hole.

"But the seal wouldn't put out its head, it just kept staring at me with its big eyes from under the water. Then I recalled the gramophone once more. I began to whistle a popular Italian air. The seal listened, but didn't budge. Then I thought I'd try and win it with my voice. In my home village I was considered a good singer. Well, I sang to the seal. First I did it softly so as not to scare it away, then louder. Lastly I used the normal pitch. In short, I gave quite a recital over the ice-hole, like some Merited Artiste.

"Long-legged Kolya liked to sing Don Juan's serenade, so I sang that, too. I aped Kolya's voice: 'Come out, O Seal, come out, O Seal! Do come out on ice!' I even failed to hold the last note, just like Kolya.

"The seal listened to me, but neither swam away nor came out, the mean thing that it was.

" 'Just wait, long whiskers,' I thought to myself. 'Do you really think a woman can't get the better of you, when her dogs need you so badly?'

"I could've touched its snout with my finger. Just then I recalled the way the Chukchi hunt seal in winter. The seal have to come out of the water to get some air, so they thaw holes in the ice with their breath. The Chukchi set up sharp fish-bones tent-like over them. As it climbs out of the water, the seal pushes the bones apart, they stick into its skin and then it can't get away: it can neither come out altogether nor dive back.

"I had a knife with me. If I lowered my arms into the water I could grab the seal under the fins, and to keep it from slipping away I could stick my knife into its side like a fish-bone.

"The hole was narrow, the beast couldn't plunge right or left and the knife wouldn't let it go down. I'd take firm hold of the knife and haul the beast out, then I'd shoot it down.

"I took that decision in a twinkling. Out I whipped my knife and bent over the hole. The round eyes looked close into my face, but I was no longer afraid.

"Before the seal could move I stuck my knife into its flank below the fin. Then I put my arms around it and started to pull it up.

"It began to flounder. I strained all my strength, but mine was a woman's strength, after all, not a man's. Had I not held on to the knife, the seal would've slipped out and swum away. The knife didn't let it go down. The seal beat about, but could neither turn nor escape. I couldn't pull it out, either.



"I lay at the hole, straining so hard my joints hurt. The beast was struggling in the narrow hole. My hands were skinned by the ice, and the water was so cold. My fingers began to get numb. It vexed me to tears. I felt I'd have to let it go, all on account of my woman's weakness. I strained all my muscles and managed to get to my knees, with the seal in my arms.

"The seal's head came out of the water. At once all likeness to the human face was gone. I put one foot on the ice. One more effort and I began to lift the beast out of the water.

" 'You won't get away, oh no!' I whispered. 'I'm not one to let you!'

"I half rose to my feet and, to drag the beast out, dropped down on my side and brought it down with me. It turned out to be nearly my length.

"The seal flopped and wriggled till it slipped out of my arms. I still had the knife in my hand, and I cut my other hand on it. The seal struck out with its tail and knocked down the lamp. The rifle fell down with a crash. We were left in complete darkness.

"The thing was not to let the beast slip back into the hole. I flung myself on the hole and covered it up with my body. The seal lunged at me, trying to get into the water. It stank of fish and blubber.

"I couldn't reach my rifle in the dark, besides, I had no idea where it could be.

"We fought on in the darkness. Something heavy and wet slapped me across the face so hard my head droned. Must've been its tail. I swung my arms, trying to stab the beast.

"Those who say seals are helpless on ice don't know what they are talking about. I was told afterwards that a walrus can fight a polar bear. Well, the seal fought *me*. Against even odds. I paid dearly for that fight. It was the first time in my life I had a tussle like that. But still I didn't let it slip away. No, I didn't!

"Later on I had to sew up the seal's skin in some twenty places. I wanted Alyosha to do it, but he insisted it was a woman's job. Well, I did it. Made fur caps for all the boys. Fine caps they were.

"I was bruised and battered all over. My body hurt as if clubbed.

"But I felt no fear at all on my way back, though the moon and ice were the same."

Boris Yefimovich resumed his narrative.

"Katya was through with her story. Masha was staring hard at her, with her chin propped on her little fist. She didn't dare to look my way.

"I said, 'That was a fine duel you had, Katya, a duel with yourself! It helped you to become a real polarnik.'

"One of the listeners said, 'Yekaterina Alexeyevna's right, anyone among us could recall some scare or other he's been through. You don't get to be a polarnik without that sort of thing.'

"'That's true, of course,' I said. 'Every man has gone through some scare like that. Only a man would hardly ever talk about it.'

"Everybody laughed, but no one objected.

"Then they asked me to tell them something.

"Well, a captain always has a lot to tell. I cleared my throat, took a mighty pull at my pipe, and said, 'We did a good piece of job today—carried all the coal ashore.'

"I saw Masha blush. 'Things don't always come off as nicely as that,' I went on. 'Sometimes you can't sail up to an island and have to land your cargo right on the ice-foot. And at times you've got to cast off before the polarniks can get the coal ashore. A wind springs up, then comes a gale, the ice with the fuel on it breaks off, and that's all you see of it.'

"Somebody asked, 'Do things like that really happen?'

"'They have,' I answered.

“ ‘And the polarniks had to winter without fuel?’

“ ‘All sorts of things happen,’ I answered. ‘Take Wrangell Island, for one. Ships couldn’t make it. So the polarniks had to spend two winters on end without fuel. They had a chance to leave by plane, but they wouldn’t. And in another place, not far from here, the wind broke off and blew away the ice-foot with all the coal on it.’

“ ‘Wintering without fuel . . . how can you?’ asked Masha. The question came in spite of herself.

“ ‘It depends on who you mean,’ I said with a laugh. ‘I’m going to tell you the story of some polarniks who proved equal to that. We all know one of them. They used the wind to keep warm in the winter.’

“ ‘You mean a warm wind? Are there any such winds in these parts?’ asked someone in surprise.

“ ‘No—why? You can get warmth out of a cold wind as well, if only you know how to do it.’

“ ‘I told them the story of an island and its courageous men.’”

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## AGAINST THE WIND

**T**he island was exposed to the four winds. Rising slightly above the ice-fields, it was lost in the sea, a flat, bare island swept clean by storms.

The sun would drop beyond the horizon for many months. In the rare cloudless days the stars glittered above the island and a tremulous radiance blazed in the sky. Then the sun would return. It climbed higher and higher as the days went by, lighting up the basalt rocks and the snowy furrows on the shore. The sea would awake and send the ice-floes drifting against each other.

But the wind never stopped blowing. All it did was to change direction and move away somewhere, only to come back and sweep again across the island, howling among the rocks like a wolf, speeding over the smooth glacier on the shore and whirling round its top, a wind laden with polar cold.

On a frosty, starlit night a man was making his way against the wind.

The wind tugged at the skirts of his short fur coat, hurled snow in his face, and tried to blow out his torch. It had piled up snow all along his way.

The man stopped.

He peered into a small booth. Inside it a meteorological instrument showed in the beam of his torch. With numb fingers he jotted down the readings. He did not pay the slightest attention to the wind. To him it was ordinary

weather, the kind he had become accustomed to during his fifteen years in the Arctic.

The wind had beaten his face dry; in fact, it had dried his entire figure, wiry and lithe, the figure of one used to life amid hardships.

Skhodov—that was the man's name—walked back to the house, feeling his way along a taut rope. He went to the instrument and back every four hours, day and night, in any weather. There was no one to relieve him, wireless operator and chief of the polar station, or his comrades, meteorologist Yurovsky and mechanic Anisimov. They had refused to take extra men, because there were sick polarniks to be replaced on another island.

Skhodov reached the station house. The wind beat him in the back; no sooner did he open the door than it rushed in.

The hoar-frost coating the doors and walls sparkled in the passage, brought out by the torch.

Skhodov walked into the wireless room lighted by an oil lamp. Its hoary walls seemed to be pasted with ragged wall-paper.

There was a frown on Skhodov's face. Yurovsky lay in a sleeping-bag.

"How're you getting on, Zhenya?" asked Skhodov.

Yurovsky coughed in reply, a dry, painful cough.

Skhodov stepped up to the youth and laid his hand on the other's forehead. He could not tell whether Yurovsky had fever. The room temperature was far below zero.

Silent and thoughtful, Skhodov sat down in front of the wireless and got in touch with Bleak Island. He tapped out the radiograms received from neighbours whom he served as an intermediary, reported the weather, and then had a doctor called to the microphone.

Anisimov, thickset and broad-shouldered, came in. He jumped and danced to shake the snow from his parka.

"There's a sick man here," Skhodov reminded him,

Anisimov pushed back his hood.

He had brought warm broth in a pot. He contrived to cook it in the radiator of a petrol runner while it charged the batteries. That was the only source of heat the three men had.

"How about some hot food, Zhenya?" Anisimov asked in a friendly voice.

"I'm cold, I'm so cold," whispered the sick youth.

The doctor was at the microphone. Skhodov told him how Yurovsky felt. The doctor asked questions about symptoms and fever and the pulse. Then he told Skhodov to hold the microphone to Yurovsky's chest.

Skhodov held the wire and Anisimov the microphone. The rattle in Yurovsky's chest was heard hundreds of miles off.

The doctor diagnosed pneumonia and warned the polarniks that it was serious.

"It's very important to keep him warm," he said in conclusion. "Beware of draughts."

"Draughts," Skhodov echoed slowly, and sat down near the sick-bed.

The house had not been heated for a long time. There was not so much as a handful of fuel. All the fuel had drifted away into the sea months before.

Skhodov recalled how enthusiastic Yurovsky had been when he arrived on the island, and the way things had impressed him. It had amazed and delighted the youth that the ship sailed up to a glacier as to a wharf, that the seamen had made their way to the island in late autumn, through solid ice, which involved such an enormous risk, and had to hasten back without a moment's delay.

After the ship sailed, a strong wind rose. Skhodov was in a hurry and granted neither himself nor his comrades any respite. Soon most of the boxes containing equipment and provisions were stowed away in the storehouse.

All that was left on the glacier was drums of petrol and a black pile—the three men's supply of coal for the next

two years. There was no telling whether the ship would succeed in breaking through to the island the following year.

They rolled ashore two drums, and then came what Skhodov had dreaded. The gale broke off part of the glacier, with the precious coal and petrol upon it.

The men stood on the edge of the glacier. The wind was pushing them down into the raging sea which dashed up icy spray and foam.

Skhodov remembered the bewildered, almost frightened look on Zhenya's youthful, dusky face. His slightly dilated eyes followed the fresh iceberg, which drifted off to two others looming in the distance like ships in a roadstead. The sea, dark in the twilight, seethed around the iceberg, lashed at it and drove it farther and farther away from the shore, stripping the men of their last hope for the recovery of the fuel.

A delicate and melancholy afterglow appeared on the horizon. It reminded the men that there was sunshine somewhere in the world.

"How are we going to live now?" Zhenya asked naively.

"Better stop thinking of a stove," said Anisimov.

"We must turn the *Sedov* back," Zhenya suggested in an excited tone. "Send a radiogram."

Skhodov cut him short, "We can't risk the ship." He turned to Anisimov. "D'you think two drums of petrol will be enough for us to charge the batteries for the wireless during the winter?"

"I'm trying to reckon that out myself, Vasily Vasilyevich. I think they may, provided we go on a starvation allowance."

Shielding his face against the wind, Zhenya walked to the house. It was a spacious one, with a piano and a bookcase in the large parlour. All the volumes of poetry had been set apart by Zhenya. Heating radiators were mounted under the window-sills. Once warm water had flown into them from a tank built into the kitchen range.

When Skhodov and Anisimov entered the kitchen, Zhenya was standing near the range. He could not put up with the idea that he would see no fire for a whole year to come.

"Vasily Vasilyevich," he said. "I just heard music from Moscow. I can't believe it's so far away. Shouldn't we ask for a plane to be sent here? It could drop us some fuel."

"Look here, Yurovsky," said Skhodov coldly. "Soviet polarniks have found themselves in a position like ours more than once. On Wrangell Island our men chose to stay for the winter even though they had no fuel. Think of Papanin's or Sedov's men. We've got sleeping-bags. We Soviet polarniks aren't going to summon a whole squadron of aircraft just to bring us coal."

His head bowed low, Zhenya listened to his chief. He had immense confidence in the might of the Soviet land and could not understand why they had to forgo summoning a plane.

Anisimov explained it to him under his breath, "Try to understand. I was an air mechanic during the war. I know what it is to fly in the Arctic night. It means a lot of risk and bravery. The plane would have to be guided, and we've got no direction-finder. Our tiny wireless is no good for that sort of thing."

Zhenya spoke no more of planes. He did his utmost to bear the hardships as staunchly as his comrades did. Skhodov watched him in silence. He saw the youth go out to the instruments in any cold, day or night, at the required hour, and on his return freeze without a complaint in the cold room.

Skhodov inferred that Yurovsky had the makings of a good polarnik.

And now Zhenya lay in front of Skhodov in a room frozen through and through, coughing painfully. Warmth could save his life, but there was none of it. Skhodov tried to think of a way to help his comrade.

Anisimov looked at Skhodov, then at Zhenya, lingered a little, and walked out.



He had hardly opened the entrance door when the wind bore down on it.

"What a tremendous strength!" he thought.

Prickly snow beat into his face. He turned his back to the wind. For some reason he recalled the slip stream of an aeroplane propeller.

How many million or even thousand million propellers would it take to give rise to that sustained blast hurtling along at such a terrific speed? Or how many propellers could be set turning if put in the way of the wind?

"Oho," said Anisimov to himself, and went into the machine room.

His eye screwed up, he looked at a petrol drum, sizing up something.

"Zhenya's going to die if we don't do something about it," he said and walked back into the house.

"Some wind out there," he began vaguely as he entered the wireless room.

"Eight points strong," Skhodov replied briefly.

"Yes, and it's never less than a fresh breeze." Anisimov sat down on a stool. "What an energy! How about turning just a tiny portion of that energy into heat, Vasily Vasilyevich?" He laughed as he kicked the radiator with the toe of his felt boot.

"Stop that idle talk. Wind motors are made at plants," said Skhodov and straightened the parka covering Yurovsky.

Anisimov fidgeted on his stool.

"During the war I had to parachute from a damaged plane. I broke my leg and was picked up by partisans. Afterwards I was with them as a field engineer."

"What of it?"

"Well, they taught me a few things about using available material. Now I'm thinking that we could make a wind motor from a petrol drum."

Skhodov got up angrily, walked over to the table, and took out the meteorological register.

"You see, Vasily Vasilyevich," Anisimov went on, "we'd take an iron drum and cut it in two lengthwise. Then we'd make a sort of merry-go-round from the two half-drums and mount it on an upright shaft. Like this." He stepped to the window and drew an S on the frozen pane. "The wind blows from the side. One half-drum is turned to the wind with its hollow and the other with its bulge. See what I mean?"

"I see."

"In the hollow the wind meets resistance, presses on, and turns the whole thing. Meanwhile the hollow of the other half-drum comes round against the wind. And round and round it goes! It'll work no matter which way the wind blows."

"That's pure imagination," said Skhodov. "We mustn't waste the drums, we keep our petrol in them. And anyway, we can't transform the energy of rotation into heat. It takes electric machinery and heaters to do that. I won't have so heavy a load put on our runner. We need it to charge the batteries."

He set to copying figures from his note-book into the register. His fingers, stiff with cold, hardly obeyed him.

The disconcerted Anisimov crawled into his sleeping-bag. For the time being he was beaten.

Skhodov stayed up. The gale howled outside. It seemed to jeer at the old polarnik, as if boasting that it had blown away the coal and now was going to take away one of his comrades.

How was it, Skhodov asked himself painfully, that he had failed to take proper care of Yurovsky? Was he to blame? Was it not his duty to train the youth to rigorous living conditions, to take the burden of the adverse situation upon himself and his comrades instead of shifting it on to flyers? It was very dangerous to fly to the island in that late season, and now that visibility was zero it could hardly be done at all.

Zhenya was dying of cold and he, Skhodov, could do nothing for him. There was Anisimov suggesting something, racking his brains, trying to think up a solution. He was a fine chap, was Anisimov, and resourceful, too, in the genuine Russian way.

Russian resourcefulness! Kulibin built an arched bridge without any props. A giant bell, made into a wheel, was moved hundreds of miles. A simple Russian muzhik amazed foreign engineers by erecting a huge column in front of the Winter Palace. He built a spiral platform and rolled the top of the "Alexandrian Column" up the platform.

Anisimov, too, was suggesting a simple solution. It was worth thinking over. There were rotor windmills, weren't there?

Yurovsky's dry, racking cough reached his ear.

Zhenya's life hinged on warmth. But how could the power of rotation be converted into heat? The dynamo could not be used for the purpose. He must not take chances with a machine which ensured the operation of the wireless.

Anisimov came up unexpectedly and sat down on Skhodov's cot.

"Why aren't you in bed?" said Skhodov. "You're going to nod on your watch."

"You see, Vasily Vasilyevich, I keep thinking of how we could do without electric machinery."

Skhodov lighted the oil lamp.

The white, shaggy walls of the room came into view.

"What can we do?" asked Skhodov, and it was hard to tell whether the question was meant for Anisimov or himself. Anisimov began to speak in enthusiastic, persuasive tones.

"Vasily Vasilyevich! When you apply brakes the brake-shoes get hot, don't they?"

"Well?" asked Skhodov distrustfully.

"You just wait!"

Anisimov picked up a torch and ran out to the shed. It took him long to dig up the door buried under the snow, but

at last he opened it and set about rummaging among old machine parts.

He came back elated.

"There's an iron pulley there," he announced to Skhodov, "and we'll make the brake-shoes from stone and fasten them with these screws here." He showed the parts he had found.

Zhenya tossed on his cot, shivering.

"Wait a bit, Zhenya, it's going to be warm!" Anisimov told him. "This is what we'll do, Vasily Vasilyevich. We put an upright steel pipe through the roof. It'll be a sort of axle. We fix its top in a bearing, and to support the bearing we make a wooden tripod. We rivet two half-drums to the pipe and presto! the merry-go-round is ready. And below we mount the iron pulley on the axle and apply brakes to it."

"But how're we going to use the heat of friction? The pulley will be overheated."

"We'll put it in water, right in the central-heating tank. The heat of friction will pass into the water. The water in the tank will get hot, then we'll have central heating!"

"It sounds so very unusual," said Skhodov. "I don't think much of it, but I'll help you just the same."

The two men set to work with feverish haste. They gave up sleep altogether. Zhenya's life depended on the rapidity with which they carried out their design. But they could not work on "wind heating" alone. Now as before, they had to watch the weather, send in reports, receive wireless messages, cook meals, and look after Yurovsky.

The snow-storm gave way to unprecedented frost. Skhodov reported: "Fifty-eight degrees below zero."

Anisimov was busy near the shed. He hopped from foot to foot and slapped his hips to get warm, humming a tune and glancing at the sky now and then. The North Star glittered overhead.

"Suppose the globe were a rotor windmill, then the end of its shaft would pivot on the North Star," he thought.

He smiled at the idea, and resumed his work on a drum.

He cut it in two. The petrol he had emptied into a tub made of ice by Skhodov.

Working with his habitual skill, he hit the chisel with the hammer squarely on the head, and there was something dashing about his last blow. The two half-drums lay on the snow.

Anisimov sighed, straightened his back, looked at the sky and the North Star, and was amazed.

It had become as light as before sunrise. Searchlights sent up their beams from beyond the horizon. For a moment it seemed to Anisimov that a fabulous ice-breaker was nearing the island. But the beams came from beyond the horizon all around him. Pale shafts of silvery light, they moved across the sky slowly and tremulously, as if feeling the unfathomable universe. Lastly they crossed close by the North Star to form a dome of light, mobile and majestic. Anisimov had never yet seen northern lights like those. But where had he watched a similar scene before?

Suddenly he laughed joyfully. Now he remembered. He threw down his tools and ran into the house.

"Vasily Vasilyevich! Zhenya!" he shouted right from the passage. "There's a 'Victory salvo' up in the sky! The Arctic surrenders! Unconditionally!"

Next day he climbed up on the roof to set up his rotor. The wind swooped down on the little human form in an effort to throw it off. Anisimov was pottering near the steel pipe which he had poked up with Skhodov's help from the kitchen.

"Go on, blow harder!" he muttered. "Rage! You silly force! Wait till we harness you. You'll turn our whirligig yet."

A bold idea flashed across his mind. What if the Arctic winds were made to revolve huge wind motors all along the coast? Then electric current could be sent south, to factories, and could replace dozens of power stations consuming coal.

"Wouldn't that be fine!" he thought, delighted with the idea, and forgetting to be on his guard, he let go of the

chimney which he had clung to. The wind struck at him. He clutched at the wooden wedge thrust into the home-made rotor by way of a brake. The wedge slipped out and the half-drums began to revolve. Anisimov lost support and toppled down.

As he lay in the snow-drift below, he listened happily to the roar of his wind motor.

Skhodov came running out of the house.

"The pulley's turning," he said.

Excited and overjoyed, Anisimov walked into the house. He immediately set about fitting brake-shoes to the rotating pulley. Those were not like the brakes applied to railway carriage wheels. He simply pressed two big stones to the pulley by means of screws.

But nothing came of it. Anisimov had expected the stones to wear down and gradually assume the shape of the surface of the pulley. But that would probably take long. Just then the stones were no good. They either stopped the pulley altogether or let it rotate unchecked.

Skhodov watched Anisimov's efforts with bitterness. Anxiety gripped him with renewed force. Yurovsky was in a most critical state, and Skhodov often lingered by the youth's cot.

On his way to the meteorological instruments Skhodov decided that he no longer had any right to rely on Anisimov's doubtful invention and risk his comrade's life. He must try to summon a plane after all. Coming back, he walked into the kitchen.

Anisimov was fussing about near the central-heating boiler. His haggard face was grimy with dust, his cheekbones stuck out and his eyes were like two dark hollows. His hands were covered with wounds and chilblains, and blood oozed from the cracks in his skin.

Skhodov watched him awhile in silence, then went to the wireless room. Zhenya lay motionless, with closed eyes; a rattle came from his chest. He had lost consciousness. A heap of snow that had fallen from the ceiling lay near the

key on the table. Skhodov held his hand to Yurovsky's forehead, then sat down and grasped the key.

Anisimov had not slept for several days. Skhodov had helped him in his work without saying a word, but now he pinned his hopes on something else. However, this "something" might also fail to materialize. He said nothing to Anisimov, for he did not want to disappoint him.

Finally that which Skhodov had been looking forward to came.

Anisimov straightened up and stared at his chief.

"A plane?" he asked, struck with amazement.

"Yes," answered Skhodov. "We've got to save Zhenya."

"But how did the flyer find his way here?"

"Perhaps instruments on the mainland helped him," said Skhodov.

Now the hum of the aeroplane could be clearly heard. The flyer was describing a circle over the island.

Both polarniks ran out of the house and listened to the roar of the engine.

"Fire a rocket!" shouted Skhodov.

Two rockets flashed in the dark one after the other.

The storm was gathering strength. Clouds of snow enveloped the house.

The sound of the propeller was dying away.

"He's dropped it," said Skhodov with relief. "Now we must look for the sacks of coal before the wind snows them over."

"Come on, let's hurry!" said Anisimov.

Skhodov stopped him.

"No. We can't both go. You must stay here. I'll search for the sacks. I'm going to mark each of them with a picket. One sack I'll bring here."

Anisimov obeyed reluctantly. Skhodov went out into the howling storm.

Anisimov entered the kitchen. Soon a fire would be blazing there. He glared at the turning pulley. He felt like stopping the useless wheel.

Angrily he began to tighten the screws, pressing to the pulley the new stone "shoes." Sparks flew from under the "shoes." Anisimov held out his hand. The sparks were hot. That was warmth. Warmth brought by a cold wind!

That warmth had to be utilized by all means.

Skhodov plodded in the snow through the raging storm. He hit on several sacks which had landed some three hundred yards from the house, and set up marks near them. But he made a mistake by deciding to look for the others at once. The storm was getting worse. The snow whirled and danced in the air and knocked him off his feet. It bore down on him from all sides, blinded him, and caught his breath; dry and unmelting, it forced its way under his hood.

Skhodov had expected to get back by the rumble of the rotor, but he discovered with alarm that he could not hear it. Was it possible that the howl of the storm was drowning the sound of the rotor?

He could not take his bearings by the direction of the wind, because it was blowing from everywhere. He was no coward, but the danger of being snowed over close by the house, together with a sackful of coal, frightened him. Utterly exhausted, he sat down in the snow, unable to believe himself. Did he really have to perish as absurdly as that?

At any rate it was useless to walk on. "I might move still farther away from the house," he argued to himself, somewhat more calmly, trying to pull himself together.

He knew what the Nentsi do in stormy weather. Sitting in the snow, he dug himself deep into the fur of his coat and rolled himself up into a ball. He must overcome the cold and, what was worse, sleep. Sleep—sticky and sweet—was stealing up slowly, dimming his mind. He ground his teeth and bit his lip to keep it off.

He strained his muscles in order not to freeze. In his youth he had engaged in "will gymnastics"—exerted his



will-power to strain and relax his muscles. Now, in his mind, he made himself walk, run, and climb rocks. He felt hot, his strength ebbed, he was spent with fatigue, but again and again he took up his hard and invisible work.

He wondered what Anisimov would have thought about in a similar plight. Probably about his wind motor or a huge Arctic wind ring sending power to factories in the south.

Skhodov began to work out how long the coal might last. Two weeks or so, perhaps.

The storm howled and roared. There was a crashing noise, as of shots, all around. It was ice shifting in the sea. The hurricane drove ice-fields against each other. Even if Anisimov had fired a shot Skhodov could not have heard it in that chaos of sounds.

But what was that rumble, importunate and unceasing? Skhodov strained his ear and jumped up.

How could he have failed to realize it for so long? It was the rotor turning! Then the storm had been unable to drown its sound.

Barely dragging his feet, Skhodov stumbled in the direction of the sound. He tried to haul the sack along, but he had too little strength left.

Bent almost in two, he toiled on, and suddenly heard a shot. So Anisimov *was* firing! There was the porch.

Anisimov saw his chief almost crawl up to the house—it was rather a dim shadow that appeared for an instant in the whirling snow.

Anisimov led Skhodov into the house and on into the kitchen. There, with nothing on but his night-shirt, Zhenya lay sprawled on his sleeping-bag.

"Take off your coat, Vasily Vasilyevich!" Anisimov urged Skhodov. "You'll get warm right away."

Skhodov sank heavily on the bench, staring in wonder at the "weeping" walls streaked with moisture.

"Warmth?" he said with an effort, as if distrusting his own senses, then asked sternly, "So you fetched some coal? And who permitted you to leave the station in a blizzard?"

"But I didn't go anywhere!" Anisimov broke in with rapture. "It's our merry-go-round working. I fixed the brakes! It was all a matter of friction. The 'shoes' had to clutch the pulley over a larger area. Here, look."

Just then Skhodov saw that the steel pipe thrust up through the ceiling was rotating. Anisimov put his hand into the central-heating boiler and snatched it out.

"It's scalding!" he cried in delight.

"And the sacks are out there," Skhodov murmured. "I marked them with pickets."

"That'll be our emergency supply, Vasily Vasilyevich. Suppose the wind should drop."

"You're right," Skhodov agreed. He rose, walked over to Yurovsky, and bent over him. "Well, Zhenya, my boy? How does it feel to be warm?"

"It's just wonderful, Vasily Vasilyevich!" Yurovsky smiled.

Skhodov stepped up to Anisimov, gave him a strong hug, and suddenly kissed him.

"We won't call for any more planes," he said firmly.

The wind darted about the island in a frenzy, sweeping the snow into heaps. It drove the ice-fields against each other, shredded the black clouds above, and lashed at the solitary house with a roar.

And once again a man walked out of the house on his way to the instruments. The wind tugged at the skirts of his short coat and raised a snow wall on his path. But now it also kept turning the strange rotor on the house-top, which rumbled like a tank.

With torch and note-book in his hands, the man was making his way against the wind.

"It was late when I finished my story—time to go to bed.

"As usual, I made the round of the ship. She lay in the roads and there was no need for me to go up on the bridge.

"The island was invisible in the darkness. All I could see

was a light in the window of the far-away little house. It looked like the lowest of the stars shining in the sky.

"My first mate was making ready to hoist the launch. I called it off. The man was greatly surprised. Unloading was over. The new passengers were already on board.

"I didn't explain anything to my first mate.

" 'Wait till morning,' I said to him and went to my cabin.

"Sure enough, Masha was waiting for me near my door.

" 'Well, Masha,' I said, 'are you going to sail before or against the wind?'

" 'Thank you, Boris Yefimovich, thank you,' was all she could stammer.

" 'How about your husband?' I asked. 'Did he also arrange to stay on the island?'

"Masha nodded, and stealthily wiped her eyes.

" 'It's the wind,' she mumbled in embarrassment, trying to account for her tears.

"But she gave me a real handshake, as a genuine polar-nik should."

That was the end of the captain's story.

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## A FIND

**D**uring a single navigation season, the *Georgy Sedov* was to make two trips that fifteen years before would have required more than one year each.

The first trip, which included visits to numerous islands, ended at Bleak Island. There the ship was to recoal and take on passengers and cargo.

Boris Yefimovich, the captain, sighed whenever he thought of the necessity of lying at anchor in port, of loading cargo, and of talks with the port authorities. It was not until he was back on the bridge that he regained his calm and became once more a skilful navigator who had long before substituted prudence for fear.

Out of narrowed eyes he was peering at the distant coast of the island to be visited next. Heavy billows broke on the shore there. He had been stubbornly waiting for more than twenty-four hours, hoping for a change in weather. He would under no circumstances risk the kungases and expose his sailors to danger.

We waited in vain for better weather, and sailed on to the neighbouring archipelago. There the ice had tamed the seas and we took on cargo, then ran back to the inhospitable island. The surf was dying down. But the captain was still biding his time. Netayev asked his permission to steer the launch and tow the kungases to the shore.

But the permission was given to the second mate. The

swell was still too heavy. The captain did not part with his binoculars for a moment.

"He's a bungler, that's what he is!" he shouted suddenly.

Netayev and I looked through our binoculars.

"That isn't the way to put about!" said Boris Yefimovich angrily. "There's the kungas on its side now and the waves washing over it."

He ran into the wireless cabin, and when he came back he was furious.

"They're soaked to the skin," he said. "They've gone to the polar station to dry. The launch is coming back. I'll give him a nice welcome, I will!" He turned to Netayev. "Ivan Vasilyevich, you will take charge of the launch. Go and change."

The young mate rushed to his cabin.

I was not there when the second mate, who had blundered, appeared before the captain, but I could easily imagine the meeting.

Netayev steered the launch. The *Petushok* had in tow the second kungas loaded with provisions and wireless equipment that had to be kept dry at all costs.

"I like that young mate," the captain said to me that evening, "he didn't let the kungas capsize. He's a chap you can trust."

I was glad for my friend.

The captain began to read a radiogram he had just received. His face, usually good-humoured, changed at once.

"Fine business. I took care of them the whole season and now I'm told to hand 'em over!"

He had received orders to sail to Estuary and there turn over his kungases to a hapless captain who had lost his boats in a gale.

The *Sedov* was nearing the end of her trip. At Bleak Island she was to be supplied with fresh kungases.

Grumbling and sighing, the captain headed for Estuary.

Early next morning we were eagerly viewing the mainland.

The kungases were handed over.

"Tell them we're sailing north," the captain said to Netayev. "It won't be so easy to deliver kungases again from up there."

Netayev passed the message on word for word. He said the luckless captain's first mate had not been very happy to hear it.

The *Sedov* made for Bleak Island.

In the familiar bay we saw the forbidding rocky island strewn with stones. On it stood a few two-storey houses, a wind motor with vanes revolving busily, and a sky-high mast.

On the mainland, to our left, there were more two-storey houses built in a semicircle. Ships lay at the moorings. We could not make out their names. Boris Yefimovich cast anchor in the roads in the best style. A berth had been assigned to the *Sedov* in harbour, but some other ship had smuggled herself in, Boris Yefimovich assured us, and taken up the berth.

He was sitting in his cabin. In port, where the pitch and roll ceased and he no longer heard the crunching of ice-floes against the ship's side, he would change beyond recognition. Helplessly he told his first mate to "see to things in port." He himself was working at his report on the trip, consulting me every now and again on the wording of some sentence or other.

Then, attired in full dress, he went ashore to pay formal visits to the port authorities.

The other captains had managed to get berths and loading facilities, but our captain came back with nothing to show for his efforts.

"He needs someone to do that for him," the first mate whispered in my ear. He was a young man and had served on warships until recently.

He came back, having settled everything, much to the satisfaction of Boris Yefimovich, who flatly refused to go ashore again.

On Bleak Island I came upon the old-timer Panchenko, a hoary polarnik who had once been a sailor. He took me to the polar station and showed me an old ledger containing the autographs of many travellers.

"There are remarkable entries here," he told me proudly. "This one, for example, was made in Norwegian in 1918. It says: 'I am confident that dozens of ships will lie in the roads in this excellent bay. Roald Amundsen.' He was a well-known polarnik. He discovered the South Pole, but he couldn't sail through the Northern Passage. His *Maud* sailed along the Northern Sea Route for three years. He had to winter twice. 'Radiograms' used to go on foot in those days. To give notice of his whereabouts he had to send two sailors to Bleak Island. One of them died. The other nearly got here, but froze to death, too. His grave is at the port, close by the new houses. But Nansen—he said outright that 'the Northern Sea Route is an illusion that has enticed explorers for centuries.' An 'illusion,' indeed! Why, captains have to fight for berths at Bleak Island because there are so many ships call here!"

He pointed angrily to a map on the wall.

"An illusion of foreign seafarers, that's what it was. The Russians never wasted their time on illusions here. And it's a pity all those non-Russian names are still on the map. Take Franz Josef Land, for one. Austrians ran into it by chance when their ship froze hopelessly into drifting ice. But its existence was mentioned, long before they came, by the Russian scientist Kropotkin. The same applies to many other lands. Look." Panchenko led me to the window. "See? That's the *Nord*, a hydrographic ship. I'm going to tell you about a discovery they made on board her."

He told me an engrossing story.

It began in the tundra.

A man was walking across the tundra.

Tall and broad-shouldered, he did not stoop under the

weight of his rucksack, nor did he seem to feel the burden of the rifle slung over his right shoulder barrel downwards, so that he could get it ready more easily.

He wore a quilted jacket and trousers of the same kind, tucked into footwear whose leather takes the shape of your feet as it dries. In footwear like that you can walk hundreds of miles without ever getting sore feet.

The man scanned the tundra. His attention was drawn to those hillocks whose northern slopes were still covered with snow. He would closely examine the white patches of snow, sometimes digging in it. He took a particular interest in the withered vegetation of the previous year. But as soon as he had made sure that it was no more than grass, he walked on indifferently.

Whenever he sighted reindeer he turned off in their direction. He apparently wanted to meet people.

The Nentsi were interested in the solitary wayfarer.

"Looking for gold, are you?" they would ask him.

"No," he would answer. "Tell me, did you ever hear—did anybody ever discover here huge animals frozen into the ground? You come, say, across a hummock on which the snow has melted away a bit and below it you see a queer sort of grass, fibrous and long. That's the hair of those animals. They lived on the earth long ago, but they've all died out."

"What's the use of an old animal? We can give you a reindeer."

The young scientist would shake his head. Taking off his fur cap, he would brush back his long tow hair with a habitual sweep of his hand and ask more questions about the mysterious ancient animals.

This made the Nentsi wonder.

"What a queer man! He isn't a hunter. No, of course not. He isn't a geologist, either. A geologist looks for stones. What do you want a dead animal for?"

There were old men who remembered huge carcasses found in the permafrost stratum.



"Foxes ate them. We had a famine and we ate that meat, too. It was eatable enough. But reindeer meat is better."

But that had been a long time before. Nothing was left of the carcasses unearthed.

The young scientist walked on across the tundra.

One day an old Nenets, so wrinkled that even his narrow eyes looked like two wrinkles, said to him, "Go to Icy Island. There's a ship anchored nearby, she'll take you there. On Icy Island you'll see some sort of carcass in the ice. I saw it myself. Don't know what it is, though."

The scientist at once went to the bay, where a hydrographic ship lay at anchor, and introduced himself to the captain.

"Alexander Lvovich Nizovsky, Academy of Science post-graduate. I've set myself the task of unearthing a mammoth preserved in the permafrost layer. The *carcass* of a mammoth, I mean," he corrected himself. "Just think of it, captain, Nature herself saves remnants of ancient flora and fauna from decay in the permafrost layer!"

Nizovsky's voice rang with animation; his grey eyes shone.

The captain stroked his well-groomed black beard. He liked the young scientist and thought that there would be no harm in taking him to Icy Island.

The island turned out to be a "young" one. Less than a thousand years old, it was covered with ice over which an earth crust had formed.

On the south side the island was thawing, laying bare the old continental ice.

The captain supplied Nizovsky with a boat and sent several sailors with him.

A month later Nizovsky appeared on Bleak Island. He was unusually excited and offered to give the polarniks a talk on the discovery he had made on Icy Island.

All those who were off duty gathered in the dining-hall of the polar station. Workmen arrived by launch from the harbour. The hall was packed so full that Nizovsky barely made his way to the front.

He told them how they had rowed up to a greenish ice wall, with a sandy bluff above it. The audience listened with rapt attention.

"It was ice exposed by the thaw," he said. "The sea gnawed and sapped it.

"I was the first to catch sight of an ice cave with an overhanging vault close by the water, and pointed it out to the sailors.

"The surf broke inside the cave, filling it with foam and spray.

"Had the breakers been stronger, we'd never have made our way into the cave or seen anything in it. Luckily for us, it was comparatively calm weather with bright sunshine.

"We carefully steered the boat into the cave. The sun shone through the ice and the vault seemed to shine, too.

"As the old Nenets had told me, a dark spot did appear through the thick sunlit layer of ice. I asked to be brought near it.

" 'There's something white sticking out,' said one of the sailors, pointing it out to me.

"A curved white shaft jutted out of the ice. Was it by chance a fin?

"We rowed as close to it as we could.

"At last I got hold of the shaft and was thrilled with excitement. There was no doubt about it—it was a tusk, a yellowish, curved mammoth tusk with a slightly cracked coating.

"The dark spot could be nothing but the preserved carcass of the mammoth whose tusk I saw before me.

"A mammoth on Icy Island, an island which did not even exist a few hundred years ago! Why, this refutes all the hypotheses about the time when mammoths died out!

"I'm now carrying this sensational report.

"I cannot but disclose to you a hope I cherish. Just now I feel I'm nearer than ever before to seeing it fulfilled.

"During the past few centuries there have been no changes in Siberia that should have hastened the disappearance of

mammoths. If there were mammoths there a few hundred years ago, why shouldn't there be any now?"

A gasp swept over the hall. Some people rose from their seats to get a better view of the bold scientist.

"Yes, I mean it," Nizovsky went on, throwing back his hair and remaining with upraised hand. "North Siberia hasn't yet been explored properly. There's tundra—and mountain ridges, too—where man has never set foot. It's there that we must look for living mammoths. And I'm sure we shall find them. I can already foresee the establishment of a mammoth preserve in the North. Measures will be taken to increase the number of the mammoths—"

The speaker was interrupted by applause.

"We'll meet again next year," he continued, slightly dilating his shining grey eyes. "I'll come back with a special expedition on board a refrigerator ship suitable for transporting a mammoth's carcass. We'll dig the mammoth out of the ice on Icy Island and—and set out in search of other mammoths, living ones. And we'll find them!"

The talk was an unprecedented success. Many polarniks volunteered to accompany Nizovsky on the planned expedition.

Seamen from a ship that lay in the roads heard Nizovsky's talk and related it to the others; the ship made a slight detour to run to Icy Island. The seamen visited the cave so vividly described by Nizovsky and saw with their own eyes the tusk jutting out of the ice. As to the dark spot, they could not see it because the sky was overcast.

In the following summer the *Nord* cast anchor in Bleak Island Bay. On board was Nizovsky who dreamed of a refrigerator ship to transport the mammoth's carcass.

With him was Academician Bondarev.

Afanasyy Vasilyevich Bondarev was old, short of stature, with grey hair and a face framed with a short grey beard. He was a peevish man. Nizovsky had a grudge against him because he would not hear of fitting out a refrigerator ship.

"You don't trust me!" he said indignantly.

"That mammoth—if it is one, which I doubt—can lie in the ice another year," replied the academician. "We must first make sure that it *is* a mammoth."

Nizovsky felt like walking out of the old man's study and banging the door. Instead he bowed his head and said in a low voice, "I'll be happy to accompany you, Afanasy Vasilyevich."

"As to accompanying me, you can certainly not get away from it, my dear fellow."

The academician had known Nizovsky's father, who had died during the blockade of Leningrad, and thought highly of him. His manner towards Nizovsky himself was austere but benevolent. He did not share the other's bold hypotheses on living mammoths; moreover, he disapproved of Nizovsky's public utterances on the subject.

One task assigned to the *Nord* was to call at Icy Island.

She cast anchor south of the island. The captain scanned the shore through his binoculars.

"Can't make it by boat," he said. "The breakers are too heavy."

Nizovsky paced the deck.

He was vexed by the captain's sluggish prudence and the peevish calm of the academician who had started a game of chess with the captain. Playing chess when the ship lay at anchor off an island with an intact mammoth in it!

"The mammoth doubtless came to the island in winter, when the sea was ice-bound," he mused. "And as it could find no food there it perished. Its carcass was covered up by snow that didn't melt during the cold summer. More snow piled up the following winter. Under the pressure of the upper layers and owing to the summer thaw, the caked snow gradually turned into ice that grew thicker and thicker."

He pictured himself reporting to the Academy of Science in session.

In his opinion, the mammoth's carcass had frozen into the ice.

Islands sink or rise periodically in Arctic seas. Covered

with ice, the island had sunk; the sea had washed sand on to the ice-crust and thus prevented it from melting.

During the last years the island had risen again above sea-level. The waves had washed off the sand covering the ice. Owing to a general warming of the Arctic the ice had begun to melt. That was how the spot with the dead mammoth had emerged into view.

Nizovsky went to his small cabin and made notes in feverish haste. Before the year was over he would defend his thesis for the title of Candidate, he thought. On subsequent expeditions he would be able to do without the tutelage of the peevish old man who refused to believe in obvious things.

He fancied himself exploring some mountain range in the North. In a valley sheltered on all sides there lived huge shaggy beasts that looked like elephants and fed on the scant northern vegetation. An observation post equipped with telescopes would be set up on a cliff. Tourists coming by plane to a mountain airfield would have the opportunity to watch the life of the wild prehistoric animals. It might even be possible to transport a specimen to the Moscow Zoo.

He read in his mind's eye a plate with the inscription: "Mammoth. Formerly considered an extinct prehistoric animal. Delivered to the Zoological Garden from Nizovsky Valley."

The young scientist went out on deck and peered at the dreary outline of the island. In the light its ice wall looked grey, not emerald-green as it had appeared before. Below he saw the white fringe of the surf.

He cursed the breakers.

The *Nord* had to ride at anchor off Icy Island for a whole week. The captain was already hinting at the necessity of sailing elsewhere and calling at the island again on the way back. Nizovsky was in despair. Luckily for him, the academician would not hear of it. While refusing to believe that there was a mammoth on Icy Island, he was loath to leave.

On the following day the breakers subsided.

The two scientists, the workmen accompanying them, and the seamen who had volunteered to help them, set out for the ice cave in a launch and two boats.

The academician and Nizovsky went in the launch. They were the first to reach the ice bluff.

"Such a pity there's no sunshine," said Nizovsky in a distressed voice. "I fear we may not see the dark spot, that is, the mammoth's carcass."

"But that tusk—I hope we'll be able to see that even without sunshine," grumbled the academician.

"Of course," replied Nizovsky. Turning to the second mate, who was at the rudder, he commanded, "Keep to the right-hand wall. Slow down. Go easy."

It was murky in the cave. Nizovsky peered excitedly into the half-dark. What if the tusk had disappeared? Impossible! It was safely embedded in the ice. But then during the past year the water might have melted the ice. Why had he not tried, when he first came to the island, to cut that tusk out of the ice? What an unpardonable blunder! But then he had been so eager to dig up the whole mammoth, without severing from it so much as a tusk.

"There it is!" shouted a sailor from the bow. "I can see it."

The motor was thumping away. Nizovsky could have thought it was his heart beating.

"Stop!"

The motor died down. Now the launch hardly made any headway, its side crunching against the ice.

"The tusk!" Nizovsky exclaimed triumphantly.

"The tusk?" echoed the academician, rising to his full height.

He reached out to the white shaft sticking out of the ice and felt it. Then he examined it on all sides.

"It's a tusk, sure enough," he muttered, puzzled. "How strange."

"I reported to you, Afanasy Vasilyevich, that—" began Nizovsky, but the old man silenced him with a wave of his hand.

It was quiet inside the cave. You could hear the soft ripple of the water and distant voices that came from the boats drawing near the ice grotto.

"Fossil ivory," concluded the academician. "How strange. It's impossible!"

"But there it is, isn't it?" said Nizovsky.

The ice cave lighted up.

"The sun!" cried Nizovsky. "How lucky! Look here. Do you see the dark spot?"

Seamen, workmen and scientists alike stared at the ice block.

A dark blurred spot was clearly visible. Imagination gave it the most fantastic shapes.

"It must be lying on its side," a sailor remarked.

"Sure," said a workman. "It wouldn't lie down with its paws slicking up, would it?"

"Well, what are you waiting for?" the academician hastened to ask. "Hurry up, cut off the ice, get that tusk out! Where are the picks and crow-bars? I'm going to help you."

Nizovsky snatched up a crow-bar, but instead of handing it to the old man, began to strike crushing blows at the ice wall. Chips of ice hit against the side of the launch. Several men hacked away furiously at the century-old ice.

"See you don't damage the tusk," the academician commanded, bustling among the working men and getting in their way. "Leave an ice coating around it."

"It's moving, the tusk's moving," said one of the workmen.

"What do you mean—moving?" queried Nizovsky, almost terrified.

"If you shake it," explained the workman.

The academician got hold of the end of the tusk and rocked it. The tusk yielded. A few more crow-bar blows. . . .

"Push this way, come on! Now pull. Pull towards you!" commanded the old man, carried away by enthusiasm.

A minute later the huge curved tusk lay on the bottom of the launch, where there was barely room enough for it.

"What a pity we had to sever it from the carcass," said Nizovsky sorrowfully.

"Now we'll take a good look at it. Cut off the ice, go on, cut it off!"

The two boats left behind came up. On Nizovsky's instructions the workmen started to widen and deepen the hole from which the tusk had been extracted.

"Strange, very strange indeed," mumbled the academician, examining the giant bone. "No doubt about it, it's fossil ivory. But why is it filed off so carefully?"

"Filed off?" said Nizovsky, taken aback.

"Yes, won't you have a look?"

Nizovsky bent over the bone which the men were gradually clearing of ice. When the ice was removed from the end of the tusk everybody was able to see for himself that the tusk had been filed off.

"I can't make head or tail of it," whispered the young scientist.

"It's very, very interesting," muttered the old man as he bent over the tusk. "The more so, young man, as your mammoth appears to have been tame. It didn't mind its tusks being carved. Just look at this."

Utterly put out with amazement, Nizovsky stared at the tusk near the filed base of which carvings were to be seen. An intricate pattern was clearly discernible on it.

Nizovsky rose from his knees, breathing heavily, and sat down on a bench.

"What is it then? Just what is it?" he asked the old man.

"It's very, very interesting!" said the other.

"Let's go on digging," suggested Nizovsky. "We must unveil the mystery of the dark spot. If it isn't a mammoth, what is it?"



"Well, yes, that would be interesting," agreed the academician. He said it rather reluctantly, still examining the figure on the tusk. "It was fastened to something, you know. Look, there are even grooves on it."

"But what could it have been fastened to?" asked Nizovsky in surprise.

"Well, to the bow of a boat, let us say."

"To the bow of a boat?"

The find was taken on board.

For forty-eight hours men were busy cutting their way to the mysterious dark spot.

Nizovsky did not leave the cave for a moment.

The academician did not go ashore any more but sat in the captain's cabin, playing chess with him; the hapless tusk lay on the floor.

The mate on watch knocked at the door.

"Come in," said the captain, stroking his luxuriant beard.

"Launch coming from shore."

"It's a bit early," remarked the captain.

"That is why I am reporting."

The academician left the game unfinished and walked out on deck.

The launch came alongside, with Nizovsky standing in it. He was shouting something to the academician, but his words could not be made out.

At last he climbed aboard by the storm-ladder.

"Afanasy Vasilyevich!" he cried as soon as his head was above deck. "It turned out to be the carcass of—"

"A whale?" asked the old man, bending over the railing.

"How do you know?"

"Of course it's the carcass of a whale," said the old man and went back to the cabin to finish his game. "I knew it was the carcass of a whale," he told the captain. "Check. Your King's done for now. I think the *Nord* may sail on."

"I beg your pardon, Afanasy Vasilyevich, it's my move now," said the captain. "But how do you account for that tusk on the island?"

"Whalers. Ancient whalers. They apparently decorated the bow of their ship or boat with that tusk."

"I give up," said the captain. "I'll go and order the anchor aweigh."

In passing by Nizovsky he stroked his beard with a smile and said, unable to restrain himself, "There's your living mammoth for you!"

Nizovsky flushed.

He complained of a headache to lock himself up in his cabin. The captain knocked at his door, but he would not open. He did not come out even when he heard a hubbub overhead; he thought it was just the ship weighing anchor to leave Icy Island.

Actually the hubbub was caused by the arrival of the sailors and workmen from the island. They said they had discovered a log cabin behind the whale's carcass.

The academician forgot about everything on earth, including the existence of his young assistant. He hurried down into the launch and demanded to be taken to the cave as quickly as possible.

As it often happens to young people, Nizovsky fell asleep with disappointment.

At dawn someone drummed on his door. He jumped out of his berth in surprise and opened.

"Sleeping, are you, young man?" began the academician in a menacing tone.

Nizovsky leapt back into his berth and covered himself with the blanket.

"Wouldn't you like to feast your eyes on what you've found, post-graduate Nizovsky?" the academician went on in the same menacing voice.

The alarmed Nizovsky saw him solemnly put down on his blanket a quiver and arrows.

He rubbed his eyes.

"They've unearthed a log cabin," said the old man with a smile. "You see, there was a cabin behind the whale's carcass," he added as if confidentially, and suddenly cried, "Now see this! Just look at it!" He narrowed his eyes at Nizovsky. After a moment's pause he put in the other's palm a few shapeless bits of metal. "Looks as if they were cut out with a chisel, doesn't it?" he demanded. "What's that? Yes. Cut out is the word. And that explains their name, 'ruble.'\* These are genuine ruble pieces!"

"Rubles?" Nizovsky exclaimed. He jumped out of his berth and snatched up the quiver and arrows which nearly fell down. "Rubles, you say? And what time do they date from?"

"Dmitry Donskoi's time, my friend. That was the fourteenth century. Remember the Battle of Kulikovo?"

"Then this is far more valuable than a living mammoth!" cried the young man in excitement.

This story prompted me to visit the *Nord*.

I saw both Academician Bondarev and Nizovsky. They showed me the marvellous find; I held in my hands the ancient Russian coins found on the Arctic island.

Stroking his beard, the academician said with a sideway look at his young assistant, "Nizovsky has made a discovery of particular value on Icy Island. His find shows that the Russians discovered the Arctic many hundreds of years ago. They whaled and traded here, having something like trading stations. The polar regions were discovered by our own people." He glanced through the round port-hole at the low shore and the forbidding, leaden sea, and added, "Discovered and explored."

I said good-bye to the two scientists.

"And what's going to become of the mammoths?" I asked Nizovsky softly.

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\* The word is derived from *rubit'*, to cut.—*Tr.*

"I mean to search for them just the same," he answered just as softly.

But the old man had a keen ear.

"He'll find them, he certainly will," he said smiling. "That is why he's going to join you aboard the *Sedov*. He wants to try and look up some loafer of a mammoth that may have strayed into the Arctic."

The two men saw me to the ladder.

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## THE BEAR-CUBS

**I**n the second half of September, which is very late for navigation in the Arctic, the *Georgy Sedov* weighed anchor to sail once more along the great Northern Sea Route. But before long she made a sharp turn and headed north. She had a route of her own running to the "northernmost land," as Valentin Gavrilovich, Doctor of Geography and a new acquaintance of mine, called that archipelago. He had boarded the ship at Bleak Island with a scientific expedition out to explore the archipelago.

Ice conditions in the western parts of the Arctic were exceptionally favourable to us. In fact, there was no ice at all for a long time and we saw nothing around us but a boundless expanse of clear water. The ship rolled heavily. At last we reached ice.

The roll ceased the moment we sailed into the ice zone. Passengers came on deck. The sun peeped out to show us colours of exquisite delicacy. And yet I had been told that there are no bright colours in those parts. The white fields parted, forming greenish lakes as calm as backwaters.

However the sun soon disappeared. A darkish haze enfolded us. Visibility dropped to zero. The ship had entered ice-free water and dense fog.

Seamen have every reason to dislike that sea, where gales and fog are so common.

"I'd have preferred ice," said Boris Yefimovich.

To crown all, the things in the cabins had come to life. The ship was rolling. I could hardly tear open the door of my

cabin. My suit-case had broken loose from under the berth and was skidding round in the company of a chair. The water-bottle had pitched out of its socket on the shelf and been dashed to pieces. In short, the cabin was a horrible mess.

The deck kept sinking away underfoot. It would have been easier to crawl than to walk on it, for it was like the slope of a roof continuously changing angle.

It was with a roll like that and in a blind fog that the *Sedov* gingerly sailed the neighbourhood of the "northern-most land." While searching for the archipelago, the captain was afraid he might suddenly crash into it or into one of the icebergs that came floating from the islands.

Taking your bearings in fog is a hard job. The sun did not show for a moment, nor did the stars. The wireless which transmitted bearings from Ruby Bay seemed to be mocking at the captain. After every check-up the ship turned out to be dozens of miles off the meridian of Ruby Bay.

"Ruby Bay is in the middle of the archipelago," Boris Yefimovich told us. "The radio waves are distorted by the rocks along the coast."

I had never heard about the phenomenon. Despite her excellent navigation equipment the ship now depended largely on her captain's skill.

The fog was very thick. The sky seemed to hang on the mast-tops and you could have thrown a life-buoy to the farthest of the waves in sight.

Valentin Gavrilovich and I stood on deck, with our backs to the funnel, near which it was warm as near a stove. My companion was a tall, sinewy man with a weather-beaten face and dreamy blue eyes.

Suddenly a vague mass loomed into view out of the fog.

"Hard to starboard!" rang out Netayev's alarmed voice. "Harder! Harder!"

The door of the captain's cabin banged.

"A bear," said the geographer calmly.

A polar bear stood on an iceberg at a level with the ship's deck.

I thought it was about to leap upon us. But the beast ran to the top of the iceberg. There it lay down and covered its black nose with its paw. It obviously imagined it had made itself invisible. The iceberg swept past, towering above the water like a block of crystal as high as a four-storey house. I knew that it was another fourteen storeys deep in the water. Foam seethed at the dark entrance of a grotto.

All of a sudden the fog was gone.

"There's the land whose existence was guessed by Kropotkin," said Valentin Gavrilovich, pointing to the horizon. "It should've been named after him, too."

Boris Yefimovich came along.

"We nearly took the bear aboard," he said with a smile.

"We'll have to do so, anyway." He showed us a radiogram which read: "Earnestly request you to pick up bear-cubs in Ruby Bay for zoo."

"So we're going to have bear-cubs for passengers?" Netayev said to me in the saloon, after being relieved from his watch. "That's interesting."

Soon the ship cast anchor in Ruby Bay, at the foot of the most remarkable cliff in the North, to which the bay owes its name. In summer-time the reddish lichens growing on it give it a ruby hue. Its walls are perpendicular and the cliff itself rises like a sky-high pedestal. A statue of proportionate height, set upon it, would have reached up to the northern lights.

Polarniks were coming to meet us in a swift little boat. The first to climb aboard by a storm-ladder was a young Georgian with black joining eyebrows and a little moustache of the kind men wear in his homeland. He at once addressed the captain.

"Please be so kind as to take two bear-cubs over from us."

When told of the radiogram about the cubs, he beamed and asked the captain for two sacks of coal.

His request was granted and he at once began to lower the sacks into the boat.

"You'd think there was eiderdown in those sacks, not coal," said the captain.

The Georgian blushed like a girl.

Later we were told that the year before he had climbed Ruby Cliff to collect eiderdown and had nearly lost his life up there. He had to clear a cleft and land on the narrow ledge of a rock wall. He leapt, but the rock crumbled under his feet, and in order not to fall he had to stand flat against the cliff. He could not turn round to leap back. His comrades ran to the polar station to get help. His strained muscles grew numb, he no longer had the strength to stand motionless, and seemed bound to fall. Then he risked a backward leap. He pushed himself away from the wall with both hands and feet and landed on the other side of the cleft. When his comrades came running with planks and ropes, the daredevil was picking up eiderdown, as though nothing had happened. He wanted the down as a present for someone. It was this incident in the mountains that the captain hinted at. He had visited Ruby Bay the year before and knew the story.

The *Petushok* was lowered and the geographer went for his luggage. Just then a whole flotilla of ice-floes drifted into the bay. The alarmed captain ordered the launch to be hoisted back. The geographer came out of his cabin with his suitcase. Being impatient to land, he cursed the tidal current, which moves first one way, then the other. A little later, when the tide turned, the floes cramming the bay left it as by magic.

The launch was lowered again. Valentin Gavrilovich was the first to descend into it. I made up my mind to go ashore with him.

"Take a look at the bear-cubs," Netayev said to me.

We were welcomed by the entire population of the polar station, including a big polar bear-cub. The cub seemed very inquisitive and eager to see what was going on at the wharf. With its pointed muzzle thrust forward, it pried gingerly into every corner. Another cub sat chained to a post near the station house.



A young girl in a light jacket saw me watching the wandering cub.

"That's my Mashka," she said.

She was small, with a little nose slightly turned up, which gave her merry girlish face a mischievous look. Her name was Nina.

"Would you like me to introduce you to Mashka?"

We walked towards the cub. But a pack of shaggy dogs surrounded the cub, barking furiously. Mashka lowered her head and kept the dogs off by striking out with her paw at them. When the threatened dog ducked the others tried to draw the cub's attention to themselves. It was just like a real bear-hunt.

As she beat back the dogs Mashka retreated to the post near which Mishka, the other cub, was straining at his chain with a menacing snarl.

Finally Mashka joined Mishka. They took up a defensive position, back to back. The dogs sat down in a circle, barked awhile with a bored look, and then scattered, feeling that they had done their duty and order had been restored.

"The dogs can't bear seeing Mashka out for a walk," said Nina. "They chase her to the post where Mishka always sits chained. But Mashka is an awful fidget, she follows me like a puppy wherever I go. She can climb up the ladder to the mast and the roof and knows how to unbolt doors to let herself into the house. She's always looking for me."

"Was she very small when you got her?" I asked.

"'Got her!'" echoed the girl with an unaccountable laugh.

We crossed to the cubs, if I may so call those fairly big beasts. Mishka squinted a distrustful eye at us, as befits a grown-up, serious bear, while Mashka began to sniff at me with frank curiosity.

I took on a careless air and even tried to stroke the she-bear, something for which I hardly needed to bend down. She did not mind it.

Then I set out to inspect the station. I also wanted to use the opportunity to look up my fellow-passenger Valentin Gavrilovich and see how he was settling down.

"He skied away to explore the island quite a while ago," was the matter-of-fact answer I got.

"Is that so?"

I had got no farther than the bear-cubs' post, while the geographer was already striding over the ice with carbine and map-case.

"Did you meet our bear-woman?" I was asked.

"You mean Nina who brought up those two bear-cubs?"

"She did more than that—she caught them. She's an excellent hunter."

To tell the truth, I was surprised. A frail, delicate girl like her a hunter! When I met her again I asked her to tell me how she went about hunting bears. I learnt that she had more than ten bear-skins to her account. Sometimes she did go out hunting, but usually she just ran into bears.

"One night I went out to the porch," she told me. "I had to check the sky—I'm a meteorologist—and what do I see but a huge bear shaking the post under the box with my meteorological instrument. I was so scared!"

The girl had rushed back into the house, snatched her rifle from the wall, run out, and brought down the big bear with a single shot.

"I was so afraid it might break the box," Nina explained, almost apologetically.

I asked her to tell me how she caught Mishka and Mashka.

"I bumped into Mishka and his mother out on ice. I had no dogs with me. I took a shot at the she-bear and she climbed an upright ice-block to die. The cub—he was quite small—stayed below. When we started dragging the she-bear's carcass over the snow, Mishka scrambled upon her back, dug his claws into her fur, and rode like that all the way to the station. Afterwards I fed him out of my own ration. I had no condensed milk myself that winter because of him. But he's grown up to be a vicious beast just the

same. Mashka wasn't like him, she came to the station of her own accord, with her mother."

Although the cubs were of the same age, Mashka was for some reason bigger than Mishka. They were great friends and could not do without each other. But Mishka probably missed Mashka more because he was always chained to the post. The moment his fidgety friend went away he would roar in a way that sounded hurt rather than angry.

An "all hands" job was on at the wharf. The chief of the station, Nina, Victor—the polarnik who had borrowed coal from us—the research workers and we, the passengers, all lent a hand.

The only man missing was the geographer. Once I fancied I saw a skier flit across the dome of a far-away glacier. It might have been the geographer.

The job was finished in a couple of days. Provisions, petrol, equipment, boxes, boards and everything else were on shore. Then we took aboard empty barrels from the station. We were expected to pick up the cubs, too. I helped in carrying out of the storehouse a crate in which the two beasts were to be placed.

Victor and Nina brought Mishka on a chain, and Mashka followed him in meek submission. While boards were being prepared to be nailed on to the crate, Mishka had to wait, chained to a drum with paraffin oil. Mashka hung confidently about the crate, getting in everybody's way. But Mishka was in a less peaceful humour. He began to roar.

"What're you roaring for, now?" Victor tried to soothe him. "You're sailing for the Moscow Zoo. You'll always eat your fill."

Mishka tugged at his chain. His collar snapped and he took to his heels; Mashka followed him.

Victor chased the cub, pulling off his short fur coat while running. He overtook Mishka and, pouncing upon him as a goal-keeper does upon the ball, covered him with his coat.

"You're a queer chap all right," he said panting as he lay upon the bear and tried to push his arms under the beast's forelegs. "It's a zoo, not a cage, you're going to live in."

But Mishka went on roaring and kicking angrily. Later we learnt that he had managed to bite his adversary's hand.

Victor rose and lifted the cub, wrapped up in his coat. Mishka screeched and kicked and wriggled, but could not break loose.

Red with the exertion (Mishka weighed not less than a sackful of coal), Victor carried the cub to the crate. Mashka trailed meekly behind.

Mishka was installed in the crate, where he quieted down.

But then Mashka got excited. She had been calm as long as she had heard the voice of her friend. Now she started to roar and scurry about, sniffing the snow in alarm.

Victor walked indifferently over to her, but she had scented a trick. She snorted, as bears do when alarmed, and ran off. Victor made after her, but she dodged him. Then he decided to use a method already tested: he took off his fur coat and flew at Mashka. But Mashka (she was stronger than Mishka) easily got away and slapped him across the face.

A clout from a bear!

The blow sent Victor sprawling fully two yards off. Before the men could raise him to his feet he was up and after Mashka.

He overtook her near the shore, but she flung herself into the bay. Victor ran into the water up to his knees. Nina dragged him out by force.

Mashka swam towards an ice-floe.

Awhile later everything was quiet. Mishka was taken aboard. Mashka came out of the water and crawled to her post. She let Nina come near her with some food, but did not touch it.

Victor called Nina and gave her a cord with a loop to be put around the cub's neck.

An attempt was made to talk her out of doing it.

"She isn't a bear, is she?" she said. "She's just Mashka. Besides, she'll be all right at the Zoo, but here—here she'll die. She'll have to die."

We all looked on to see what would happen.

Nina stepped to the cub and stretched out her hand with the cord.

Mashka seemed to be transformed. She dodged with a low roar. Then Nina bore down on Mashka's back and gripped it with her hands and legs. She was using force against her pet to save her.

The cub snarled, but Nina would not let her go. Mashka shook Nina, but the girl held on. Victor was only a few paces away. Just then the cub shook off the girl. Something like snow or fluff floated up above the scene of the battle. Instead of a harmless cub we saw a ferocious and strong beast. Victor made boldly for Mashka, holding his coat ready. The beast took to flight. Bear and man disappeared behind the storehouse.

We hurried to Nina, but she was already back on her feet. Her jacket was torn and her arm bleeding; the cub had bitten her hard to break loose. There was eiderdown whirling in the air.

"I regret nothing so much as my jacket," said Nina, her face twisted with pain. "This down is a present. What a silly thing, that Mashka! How shall we save her now?"

They took Nina to the station house to dress her arm.

Victor came back, panting.

"We must shoot down that bear," he said. "Only Nina mustn't get to know about it. You know how she loves Mashka."

We agreed with him. A grown-up bear could not be left at the station, where there were people.

Dusk fell. The long northern afterglow hung above the bay. Now the sky was of a translucent orange hue, the sea greenish, with white ice-floes in it, Ruby Cliff a mass of crimson, and our ship just a dark silhouette. Grotesque ice-blocks rose farther away, in the strait between the bay and

a neighbouring islet. Some of them looked like houses with roofs caved in and others like snow mounds sloping down into the water. The largest iceberg resembled an ancient ship with high bow and stern.

Suddenly I caught sight of a she-bear on one of the nearest floes. She stood motionless as a statue, her muzzle turned up towards the ship. Merged with the floe as if she, too, were made of ice, she was floating past the ship. But she was not made of ice, she was alive and roaring sadly.

I heard an answering roar from the ship. Mishka had recognized his friend.

The current swiftly carried the she-bear past. As I stood on the shore I saw Mashka jump into the water and make for the shore with the agility of a dolphin. She clambered out on to the rocks and ran towards the houses, growling softly and plaintively. The dogs she came across darted aside one after another, as though respecting her sorrow.

Mashka sped upstream along the shore and leapt into the water again. In a few minutes she was on another floe and sailed past the ship once more. And again the parted friends roared.

Then Mashka again ran along the shore. Her persistence was astounding. Again and again she sailed past the ship.

People looked on in amazement. Nobody joked.

The seamen were saying good-bye to the polarniks, for the ship was due to sail before dawn.

The geographer came aboard. He had been working on an article about the Ruby Bay glaciers. I was to take the manuscript to Moscow. It had prevented him from doing his share of the "all hands" job. His comrades had readily released him from all duties, but he would have none of it and had volunteered to heat the bath house throughout the winter.

"So these are our spoils: an article and a bear-cub," I said, taking the manuscript.

"What cub?" asked the geographer in surprise. "Were there any bears prowling about here?"

I broke into hearty laughter. That dear geographer! We embraced each other.

I shook hands with Nina and Victor and stepped into the launch. From it I could see well the whole area of the polar station. There was a crowd on the shore. My gaze wandered to the post near which I had first seen the cubs. Mashka was there. She stood hugging and shaking the post. I heard her mournful roar.

I glanced at Nina.

"I'll save her just the same," she said softly but firmly.

She knit her eyebrows for a second, then smiled at us who were sailing for the Big Land. She was staying for another year, out there at the world's end. I was sure she was going to take Mashka far out into the ice-fields and leave her there.

The launch cast off.

It became dark. We could no longer see the shore where the last lights had gone out in the little houses. I did not feel like sleep, so I stayed up till dawn. The captain ordered a farewell salute to the polarniks. He knew well how greatly people in the North appreciate the slightest signs of attention.

Rockets shot up. For an instant they snatched out of the dark the steep shore, the glaciers, the sombre mass of Ruby Cliff. Some of them fell into the water before they had burnt out, and then spots of light shimmered under the water.

Whenever the shore was lighted up I could glimpse the houses and the solitary post.

There was no one near the post.

Many days later we were sailing in a sea clear of ice.

The captain pulled open the door of my cabin.

"There's a bear on deck. Be careful!"

A bear on deck? I could not help recalling the iceberg with the bear which might have jumped aboard. But then we had left all icebergs far behind.

Mishka's cage turned out to be empty. It appeared that,

like Mashka, he knew how to unbolt doors but had so far kept it secret. Now he had broken out of his cage.

He was searched for all over the ship, but could not be found. He had vanished.

We concluded that he had jumped overboard.

"He'll be all right," Boris Yefimovich assured us. "Bears have a remarkable custom: when a she-bear comes across a strayed cub out in the ice-fields she adopts it."

But the ice-fields were so very far away. Had the cub been able to swim as far as that? Hardly. But it might have.

Everything was cleared up when Netayev came from his watch back to his cabin.

The runaway cub was sleeping under his berth.

Netayev had been the only one to find the key to the beast's heart.

He had watched the whole scene of the bears' sorrow. Touched by it, he had visited Mishka's cage, fed and fondled him, and taught him this and that. And Mishka had taken to his new friend. Then, missing his protector, he had escaped from his cage, sniffed his way to Netayev's cabin, and stolen in through the half-open door. During the roll the door had slammed to.

The most stirring part of the cubs' story was probably its finale, which I unfortunately did not have a chance to witness.

Nina and Victor succeeded after all in saving Mashka.

They could certainly not leave the beast at large because she was used to the polar station and could find her way to it at any time.

So they put a cord around the already calm and submissive Mashka's neck, and skied thirty-five miles with her.

They reached a neighbouring point where the *Nord* was expected to call.

Mashka safely boarded the ship and soon, I understand, walked freely on deck and was petted by all.

The *Nord* arrived in Arkhangelsk immediately after the *Sedov*, and there Mishka and Mashka met.



The two beasts, I was told, at once recognized and fondly sniffed each other, then snorted and took up a defensive position, back to back.

The evening when Mishka was found in Netayev's cabin we learnt that Mashka was aboard the *Nord*. In the saloon Netayev engaged in a heated dispute as to whether it was permissible to shoot polar bears. He reminded those around him of the prohibition to kill polar bears unless they attack people. And the fact is, a bear seldom attacks anyone.

When the dispute was over, yielding to Netayev's arguments, we all voiced a desire for the establishment of a polar-bear preserve in our country. It might be set up in the Far North or north of a certain parallel.

"Glacier Island is a place where bears have lived a particularly easy life in recent times," said the captain, rising to go to the bridge. "No ship has managed to make it during the last five years."

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## HEXA

**I**t was absolutely necessary for us to make Glacier Island, one of the remotest and least accessible islands in the Arctic.

Once a pick and a shred of the Russian tricolour were found among the bare basalt rocks of Glacier Island. They marked the grave of a Russian explorer who had pushed on undaunted to the North.

Afterwards the most northerly polar station was set up on the island by Soviet people. It proved most valuable for the science of weather. But during the war the station was evacuated.

Whenever an attempt was made to re-establish the Glacier Island station in the post-war years, impassable ice blocked the ship's way.

Having failed the year before, Boris Yefimovich, the captain, was resolved to land a group of winterers on Glacier Island at any cost.

The ship was running north through a mass of ice-floes separated by dark spots—not of water but of fresh ice that looked like brittle glass. Its thin, transparent cakes piled upon each other as they gave way to the ship. Inside them I could see the white sheets of ice and lumps of snow that did not melt in water.

In Ruby Bay I heard the story of the re-establishing of the station on Glacier Island by reaching it on foot.

One of the principal characters of the story was Hexa, a dog.

The name means "witch" in Nenets.

Hexa was presented to polarniks on the mainland by an old Nenets. He apologized at great length for the fact that she had only three legs, one having been bitten off by a polar bear. But he insisted that Hexa had many good qualities, that she could all but talk, and understood whatever was said to her.

Such was Hexa's fame, and whenever she hung about the mess-room door, as was her habit, the polarniks laughed and said she was "eavesdropping."

In Ruby Bay Hexa unexpectedly gave birth to four pups. The shaggy pups, petted by all, bounced about the station like balls. Meteorologist Mikhail Ivanovich, a stout man suffering from asthma, took them along whenever he went out to check his instruments; they scurried after him, barking in unison and protecting him, he said, against polar bears. Vanya, the wireless operator, always waited for the pups to burst into the wireless room in search of some tasty morsel, which he always had in store for them.

By spring the pups had grown up to be sturdy dogs. They raced about the shore and started barking, as Hexa had taught them, whenever an inquisitive seal popped its head out of the water. That meant they wanted someone to come and shoot the seal.

The day when the question of an early re-establishment of the Glacier Island station was discussed in the mess-room, Hexa hung about the door, "eavesdropping" as usual. This time, however, she had a good reason for listening and worrying. The talk centred about her own sons.

It was Mikhail Ivanovich who suggested setting out for Glacier Island on foot. He planned to harness the four young dogs to a sledge. The men were expected to help them pull the load.

"We're sure to make it, while a ship might fail again," he said.

Lavrov, chief of the station, was surprised.

"What is this now, Mikhail Ivanovich? Do you really think you can? Why, it's a hundred and fifty miles! Then there's your weight . . . and that asthma of yours."

"Never mind," Mikhail Ivanovich replied, mopping his broad face framed with a beard that he had let grow shortly before. "Young people need a senior companion on a march like this. Who else should go but the Party organizer?"

"No easy job, that," said senior mechanic Matvei Sergeyevich, a judicious and deliberate man, shaking his head. "It's an archipelago, you know. You'd have to make your way across islands and straits. The ice might break. Besides, the blizzards are heavy in those parts. Once you're snowed over you can't dig yourselves up."

"Rubbish!" said second mechanic Yury, a long-legged youth. "Men carried the Russian flag on foot all the way to Glacier Island. And it was this bay they started from, too. Their ship lay at anchor here."

"Yes, they did make the island. Only they buried their chief there," remarked Matvei Sergeyevich, "but we must work."

"You may stay here!" said Yury hotly. "As for me I'm willing to go."

Matvei Sergeyevich shrugged his shoulders. He did not feel like leaving Ruby Bay. He was building a rotor wind motor to replace the one broken, and was anxious to finish the job.

The group was finally made up of Mikhail Ivanovich, Yury, and Vanya, the wireless operator who had once worked under geologist Galya. Moscow authorized the expedition.

Mikhail Ivanovich at once began the preparations and introduced training practice. Every day the three climbed a glacier, pulling loaded sledges that were too heavy for the incomplete team of four young dogs. Hexa invariably accompanied the group of her own accord.

They returned to the station worn out.

"I wonder why we do all this," grumbled Yury. "At a pace like ours we could've made Glacier Island long ago. Back

in Moscow I used to take part in ski contests. Bah! We haven't all got surplus fat to get rid of!"

Vanya, bashful, blue-eyed and freckled, kept an embarrassed silence; Mikhail Ivanovich smiled good-humouredly but objected in a rather harsh tone.

"Boys, you must get used to discipline as well as to walking. We have no right to fail."

At the station they toasted bread and rigged up a wireless for the expedition.

Yury, who was impulsive and easily carried away, urged the others to start. But Mikhail Ivanovich was taking his time. He wanted every single contact in the wireless to be soldered as painstakingly as parachutes are fitted out before the take-off.

No one but Lavrov heard Mikhail Ivanovich groan at night.

"Why don't you cut down your load?" he said to Mikhail Ivanovich. "The thing is to get to the island. There you'll find everything you need. The storehouse is full."

"Is it?" said the other doubtfully, rubbing down his aching feet. "Ever hear of disappearing islands? The sea is whitening away the shore at Glacier Island. During the past years the buildings may have tumbled down."

"Perhaps so," the chief agreed. "I think you'll have to take provisions for the journey back, too. You must come back if there are no stores left."

At last Mikhail Ivanovich announced a long training march of thirty to sixty miles. Yury hinted to the girls that although Mikhail Ivanovich called it a training march he would try to reach the goal.

The courageous three were seen off by all the Ruby Bay winterers.

It was mid-April, the sunniest season in the Arctic. The Arctic night had ended a month before and the days grew longer with every sunrise. Snow and ice glittered with myriad sparks. The only place where the snow did not hold

was Ruby Cliff, then dark-grey and looking like a giant block of concrete.

The men embraced each other. The girls—there were three of them—kissed Vanya and Yury.

"I'll ski over to see you!" cried Yury. "A hundred and fifty miles isn't much of a distance."

The young dogs were barking impatiently in the harness. Crafty Hexa was tugging at her straps, the hair on the back of her neck bristling.

Soon the little caravan stretched out on the sparkling snow. In front was a roundish form followed by another two forms, one tall and one short, then came four very small ones and the sledge which, seen from afar, was a mere speck on the white snow.

Heavy Mikhail Ivanovich led the way, straining at the straps. They went along the coast, over crusted snow which glittered in the sun like a bright waterway. Icebergs frozen into the ice rose in the strait.

The dazzling whiteness of snow is dangerous. Mikhail Ivanovich was afraid of snow blindness and had everyone put on sun-glasses.

He had started at a swift pace, as if he wanted everybody to wear out on the very first stretch. Yury was twice compelled to overcome his self-respect and hint at camping. Mikhail Ivanovich laughed away the idea and pushed on.

Before long the two young men ceased to notice the steep shore-line or the icebergs along the route.

Their only thought was: "Just keep going. Forget all around you and walk on. Pick out some point far ahead and make for it. Draw breath every three paces—in, out, in, out. Don't think of anything else."

They halted only once to have some food which they warmed up on the primus.

Then they started towing again, with their eyes on the ground.

Mikhail Ivanovich was the only one who looked ahead, and whenever he looked back he smiled at his companions.

The sun set. The afterglow tinged the sky with delicate shades of orange, and faded.

Yury could not stand it any longer.

"I personally don't mind, of course," he pleaded, "but a man's system has to get used to it, you know."

"We'll camp on the other side of that cape, out of the wind," replied Mikhail Ivanovich.

It was in a state of complete exhaustion and with numbed feet that the three crawled into their sleeping-bags.

"Why didn't I think of it before!" said Mikhail Ivanovich. "We should've slept the last nights in bags to get used to it."

Vanya and Yury made no answer. They were asleep.

Mikhail Ivanovich got up before the stars faded, and woke the young men.

Yury was annoyed to realize that he could not get up.

"I don't understand it, Mikhail Ivanovich. If this is a march to the island, please say so. I'm willing to stand anything, but doing it for the sake of training—why, there's no sense in it!"

Mikhail Ivanovich said nothing, but gave the youth a hard look.

Vanya scrambled out of the bag which he shared with Yury. The other at once felt cold and ashamed. He crawled out, too. His feet and back were aching.

"No sportsman trains like this, I can tell you," he muttered.

Once again they put themselves to the sledge and set off. The sun was not up yet. But the sky had brightened and the stars had grown paler.

Yury was breaking down. He was equal to any brief physical effort and had actually taken part in ski sprints. He had also patiently borne up under the daily training. But the strain put on him now seemed beyond human endurance. He bowed his head and bit his lips till it hurt; still he did not pull hard enough. Vanya noticed it but said nothing.

Suddenly Yury stopped the dogs and sat down on the sledge.

"I just can't go on," he stammered, afraid to look Mikhail Ivanovich in the face.

Mikhail Ivanovich sat down beside him.

"See here, my boy," he said in a soft, good-humoured tone. "How do they test, say, a rope? With a weight heavier than it'll ever have to bear when actually used. If it holds it is considered strong enough. It's the same for us. This is more than training, it's a test. You'd better go back now than fail to fulfil the task later."

"I'll rest a little," mumbled Yury in confusion.

Mikhail Ivanovich turned back.

It took them two days to get back, and all that time Yury was gloomy. A struggle was going on in him.

When Ruby Cliff came in sight he asked for a halt.

"I'm not shirking, Mikhail Ivanovich," he said, "please don't think I am. It's just that I don't want to be a burden. You've got a task to fulfil, but I haven't got the strength."

"Thanks for saying that, boy," answered Mikhail Ivanovich.

At Ruby Bay the three were given a hearty but wary welcome.

All the polarniks gathered together again.

"I'm willing to work as a mechanic," said Yury, staring at the floor. "I can finish the wind motor. And I'm ready to do any odd jobs. I'm going to train. Perhaps I'll have to go some other time."

As he spoke he swore to himself never again, as long as he lived, to cut such a sorry figure in front of his comrades.

"Yury'd certainly have held out and made it," said Mikhail Ivanovich. "But you know we mustn't take any chances. We've got to fulfil the assignment. That training proved useful after all. See how slim I look now. Well, who'll take Yury's place?" he asked, looking at Matvei Sergeevich.



Lanky Matvei Sergeyevich stroked his hollow unshaven cheeks and made no reply. "So it's a mechanic they need again," he said to himself. "Whether you want to make a wind motor or pull a sledge, you can't do without a mechanic." The fact was, he did not want to go, for he was building a wind motor of a wonderful design he knew well. He had already made all the calculations with the aid of an engineering encyclopaedia and had riveted together two iron half-drums.

"What do you say?" Mikhail Ivanovich asked him.

"When are we supposed to start?" queried Matvei Sergeyevich in a businesslike voice. You could read his thoughts on his face.

"In a day or two. Before the straits come back to life."

"Then I suppose I must go," said Matvei Sergeyevich with a sigh, and beckoning to Yury, he went out. He led the youth to the workshop and told him all about how to make the rotor; then he made him repeat his advice over and over again.

Yury was ready to tackle any job, whether it was building a home-made wind motor or a second Dnieper power station in the Arctic. But because nobody had a word of reproach for him he felt unhappier still.

Once more the polarniks saw their comrades off. But this time everybody felt less excited.

Yury was waiting for the party beyond the cape.

He heartily shook hands with each one, saying nothing, embraced and kissed Mikhail Ivanovich, and ran back. Mikhail Ivanovich lingered a little and smiled as he watched Yury go; then he went on.

"Look, here comes Hexa!" cried Matvei Sergeyevich.

Hexa was running towards them with a piece of cord around her neck.

Mikhail Ivanovich shouted at her in a shrill voice. She sat down on the snow, but when the three moved on she hobbled after them. Then they stopped.

Vanya and Matvei Sergeyevich hurled a few snow-balls

at Hexa. She ran off and sat down again. There was a wolfish obstinacy about her. The harnessed dogs barked nervously. Mikhail Ivanovich picked up a rifle from the sledge and threatened Hexa with it. But she remained sitting there, with her tail curled about her forepaws. Mikhail Ivanovich fired a shot in the air. Hexa hid behind a jutting ice-block.

They started off again. Hexa was nowhere to be seen. She must have gone back.

The men were following an old trail which was not snowed over yet.

This time Mikhail Ivanovich was leading his companions at a slower pace and the halts were more frequent. He was anxious to spare both men and dogs.

The first days were particularly trying. At the halts the exhausted dogs dropped down on the snow and rolled up. Matvei Sergeyevich lit the primus with soldierly alacrity. Mikhail Ivanovich pitched the tent, humming some air out of tune, while Vanya called up Ruby Bay by wireless.

Hexa followed them after all. Nobody tried to drive her back any longer. She ran busily now ahead of them, now at the side, sniffing.

"Just look at that scout," said Matvei Sergeyevich, nodding at her.

"Leave her," said Mikhail Ivanovich. "She'll at least warn us of bears."

By the third day walking had become a habitual state with them and their feet seemed to move along of their own accord. Now they looked oftener about them.

The route led from island to island. White-capped cliffs, treeless and powdered with snow, rose steeply all around. There was nothing but that white expanse of ice, dreary as a clouded sky.

"A barren land," said Matvei Sergeyevich.

"Don't be so sure!" Mikhail Ivanovich objected. "There might be coal here. And the magnetic anomalies in these parts— isn't that a sign of iron? I can't use my compass, you

know. It misleads me. I try to go by the map, from cape to cape."

It was a fact that Mikhail Ivanovich did not use his compass. He had studied the map of the archipelago so thoroughly that he seemed as much at home on the islands as in his own back-yard.

Fine weather gave way to a head wind that made breathing difficult. The wind brought tears to the men's eyes, beat against their chests, checking their advance, and doubled the weight of the sledge.

They plodded on against burning tongues of white flame that swept over the crusted snow or sped upwards in a foam-like stream. It was like wading through water. They felt dizzy and had to grope for their way. The dogs could not be seen.

The best thing to do was to sight a cliff, cape or iceberg ahead, and make for it; that took away the dizziness.

Gathering strength, the wind grew into a frenzied blizzard.

The three had to pitch camp. The dogs at once nestled against the tent and were snowed over, and soon the tent became a pile of snow. Men and dogs lay side by side, with just a canvas between them. They could not so much as stick their heads out. Still Vanya managed to send a report to Ruby Bay that they lay under snow. Ruby Bay radioed back that Moscow was following their every step.

Vanya lay in the same sleeping-bag with Matvei Sergeyevich.

"What if the house has tumbled down with the shore, as it did on Disappearing Island?" he said softly.

"In that case we'll go back."

"I'm not afraid," Vanya hastened to add. "I was just wondering."

Two days and nights were spent in the snow-drift. Ruby Bay radioed a weather forecast. The blizzard was expected to die down. The men decided to dig their way out. While they were at it the blizzard did subside.

Once again they marched on at a measured pace; snow-covered cliffs and the blue zigzags of glaciers, sliding downwards in huge "ice cataracts," moved past.

They had gone more than half the way.

But the blizzard had covered the straits with snow. It was risky to cross them, there might be cracks or thin ice under the snow. Mikhail Ivanovich led the way, taking every precaution and probing the ice with a pole. He had a reason to consider himself the heaviest man because he weighed more than two hundred pounds. If the ice held *him* they were all safe. But the sledge was heavier still.

Suddenly Vanya was jerked back.

"The wireless!" he shouted, rushing to the sledge which had sunk under the ice.

The ice was crackling and the dogs were floundering helplessly.

"Lie down flat!" shrilled Mikhail Ivanovich.

Vanya fell down. Matvei Sergeevich and Mikhail Ivanovich crawled to the sledge. So did Vanya.

The dogs were being dragged under the water.

"Cut the straps!" shouted Mikhail Ivanovich.

"The wireless! The wireless!" Vanya kept on shouting. "Wait a second!"

By then the wireless was under the water with part of the sledge. Its loss would spell complete failure for the expedition. It was expected to serve them not only on the way but on Glacier Island as well.

The loss of the sledge would mean the loss of the provisions. The men pulled at the straps. But the ice kept on cracking. It was a thin upper layer. Now the water was gushing from the gap and the cracks.

"Leave the sledge, crawl back!" Mikhail Ivanovich commanded.

But Vanya wriggled to the gap like a snake and lowered his arms shoulder-deep into the icy water. He felt the sledge, grabbed the wireless, and strained to pull it out. The ice was

crackling and breaking under him. Matvei Sergeyevich caught hold of Vanya's feet.

"Pull!" cried Vanya.

Matvei Sergeyevich started to crawl away from the gap, cautiously dragging Vanya by the feet. Vanya clung on to the wireless.

Finally it was out on the wet ice.

Then Matvei Sergeyevich whipped out his knife and cut the straps. The dogs broke loose and scrambled out, mad with terror. The sledge was gone.

The men crawled towards the shore, leaving a broad trail on the snow-powdered ice.

The soaked wireless was all that they had salvaged from the load. Nothing else was left—no food, no rifle, no primus.

The drenched men could not even get warm.

"We must go on, boys," said Mikhail Ivanovich when they reached the shore. "That's our only hope. We must keep going to get warm. There's nothing else we can do."

"Which way shall we go?" asked Matvei Sergeyevich.

"It's a hundred and twenty miles to Ruby Bay and thirty to Glacier Island. We have no food, but we must get to the station."

"So it shall be Glacier Island," said Matvei Sergeyevich grimly, dancing to warm himself.

"But we might find nothing on Glacier Island," said Mikhail Ivanovich.

"Or the storehouse might still be there," replied Matvei Sergeyevich to the rhythm of his dance.

"The wireless is soaked, but I'll fix it up—on Glacier Island," Vanya put in, his teeth chattering. "Once I couldn't repair it, out in the tundra, but this time I will."

The dogs were busy licking their wet hair and biting out icicles from between their claws.

The men walked on, taking turns to carry the wireless.

Ruby Bay was alarmed. No one knew what had happened. Moscow was worried, too.

Yury was nervous, he insisted that a rescue party be sent and wanted absolutely to go himself. He spent days on end in the wireless room, tapping out again and again:

"Glacier Island, where are you? Answer us, we are listening. Glacier Island, where are you? Where are you? Tell us what happened. We are listening. Where are you?"

Those words were heard throughout the Arctic; the three guessed that they were being searched for, but they were unable to answer. They trudged on day and night in their frozen clothing.

They had had nothing to eat for over forty-eight hours now. They did not halt to rest but simply fell down on the snow.

At their last halt they lay very long. Dangerously long.

The first to sit up was Matvei Sergeyevich. He looked darkly at his exhausted companions who lay in the snow, then at the dogs with the hair standing up in tufts on their ribs. The four dogs from the team and Hexa sat beside the men, staring at them with hungry eyes.

Matvei Sergeyevich got out his knife, deliberately pulled off his mitten and tried the blade with his thumb. Then he began to call one of the dogs.

"Hey, you there! Come here, doggie, come, you walking food."

Vanya propped himself up on his elbow.

All the dogs jumped up and looked at the man, wagging their tails.

"Come on. Here! Want some meat?" He made a show of taking something out of his pocket.

One of the dogs walked up, cringing and licking its lips.

Matvei Sergeyevich put out his left hand, grabbed the dog by the scruff of the neck and swung up his right hand holding the knife.

"Matvei Sergeyevich! You can't do that! You can't!" Vanya yelled as he seized the other's arm.

The dog whined. Hexa started barking.

Matvei Sergeyevich was wrestling with Vanya.

"What's come over you?" he cried angrily. "Do we want to fulfil our task or behave like sissies? Don't you see this is food? We haven't eaten for two days. We need strength."

Vanya would not give in.

"But they are dogs! Our own dogs! We'll need them yet."

The delay gave the dog a chance to break loose. It ran off a few paces, but Hexa flew at it and began to bite it in rage. The dog yelped and ran farther away.

Hexa drove away the other dogs, too.

Mikhail Ivanovich had to settle the argument between Vanya and Matvei Sergeyevich. The point at issue was whether one of the dogs should be eaten or not.

"Think how useful they'll be to us when we get to the island," said Mikhail Ivanovich, looking at Matvei Sergeyevich with entreaty.

Matvei Sergeyevich shook his head.

"That settles it," said Mikhail Ivanovich firmly, "we won't touch the dogs."

Matvei Sergeyevich shrugged his shoulders.

Vanya asked his comrade to give him the knife, as though distrusting him.

"What for?" asked Matvei Sergeyevich angrily. "D'you think I don't know what discipline is?"

Vanya was embarrassed.

"No, I didn't mean that. Just give me the knife. I'm going to scrape off the ice from the wires."

"All right," said Matvei Sergeyevich sarcastically.

To justify his request Vanya set about prying into the wireless with his benumbed fingers, cutting the ice off the wires with the knife.

Suddenly he gave it up and looked at Matvei Sergeyevich.

"Does ice conduct electricity, Matvei Sergeyevich?"

"No," the mechanic retorted.

"That's what I thought, too," said Vanya joyously. His eyes shone. "These condensers here—they're wet and have lost their insulating properties. But what if we dried them?"

I don't mean that, though, I mean if we froze them thoroughly? Wouldn't that be the same as drying them? Hey?"

"I suppose so," said Matvei Sergeyevich doubtfully.

"What are you waiting for, then?" cried Mikhail Ivanovich. "Get to work, try it."

"Just a moment," Vanya replied cheerfully.

"Bring that wireless here. Stand against the wind, freeze it through!"

Standing there in the piercing wind, their clothes frozen stiff, the men tried hard to freeze the wireless.

Then Vanya tried with trembling fingers to tune in.

There was a crackle in the earphones.

Vanya hugged Matvei Sergeyevich, forgetful of his quarrel with him. Mikhail Ivanovich hurried him; he wanted to send a radiogram.

At last Ruby Bay received the message.

"Twelve miles from Glacier Island," it read. "Lost communication because of soaked wireless. Sledge sank into ice-hole. Trying to fulfil assignment."

The message came on the third day after communication was lost. People in the Arctic drew a sigh of relief. There was not a single polar-nik but listened anxiously to the ether or asked a friend thousands of miles away for news about *them*.

No one had an inkling of the price which the three polar-niks were paying to "fulfil the assignment."

They no longer walked but staggered on, falling and rising again. They had made the straps into a rope and tied it round their waists. Their eyes had dimmed and their ears were full of a din like the roar of a sea freed from ice and buffeting rocks.

The dogs ran after the men but never came close to them. Most likely Hexa would not let them.

The men got there just the same.

"Ascending glacier on Glacier Island," they radioed.

They did not ascend the glacier but crawled upon it on their bellies, strapped together. They crawled up gnashing



their teeth, their eyes shut tight with the exertion, biting their lips, and scratching their frozen cheeks sore against the rugged snow-crust.

And they reached the summit.

They had to go on. The goal was not far off now.

The three men stumbled on. The dogs followed them at a distance.

Mikhail Ivanovich led the way as before, straining at the rope. He held a stick in his hand, leaning upon it, or perhaps groping his way like a blind man. And suddenly he dropped out of sight.

Vanya jerked forward and fell. Matvei Sergeyevich sat down and spread out his long legs, digging his feet into the snow. He threw down the wireless, which he had been carrying, and clung to it as to a life-buoy.

Hexa rushed forward and started to bark at the hole in the snow.

"Hold on, commander!" shouted Matvei Sergeyevich.

Vanya recovered from his bewilderment. Together with Matvei Sergeyevich he began tugging at the rope. Mikhail Ivanovich's face, bearded and frost-bitten, emerged from the hole. He was snatching convulsively at the snow. His comrades helped him out.

"It's a cleft, boys, a cleft," he mumbled with an effort.

Vanya threw a snow-ball into the hole. There was a plop somewhere deep down.

Matvei Sergeyevich shook his head.

They must make a nearly mile-long detour to round the cleft.

Another mile to go!

The men's strength was spent. The detour cost them a greater effort than the last ten miles had. They could no longer rise to their feet but made headway on all fours as they crept up a hummock, thinking it to be the last.

Meanwhile Mikhail Ivanovich was saying in his cheerful little tenor voice, "It's the last one, boys. The moment we get to the top we'll see the houses. There's a storehouse

there, too," he went on, dropping his voice to a whisper for some reason, "and in it we'll find fat hams, smoked sausages, tinned food, sardines, sprats swimming in oil, or tinned meat. There's a primus there, we're going to light it and make a fine broth, fat and hot—so hot we'll burn our lips."

His words gave the men the strength to climb the knoll.

"We'll see it as soon as we're on the top," Mikhail Ivanovich whispered on.

They crept to the last top, too. And they did see it.

The place was lifeless and white with snow. The thin mast of a wireless station, bent at the top, jutted out of the snow as on the brink of a precipice. As to houses, there were none near it.

The men lay in the snow. They were afraid to look at each other. The old polar station had vanished. It must have tumbled into the sea with part of the shore.

Sitting in front of the wireless in Ruby Bay, Yury was crying, unashamed of the presence of girls; he had received a radiogram about the situation on Glacier Island. No relief could be sent because the ice was gone from the straits by then. Besides, there were no team-dogs in Ruby Bay.

Six months later the *Sedov* drew near Glacier Island.

While viewing the island through binoculars, I recalled all that I had been told in Ruby Bay.

First I saw a thin mast, slightly bent at the top, rising above the bastion-like rocks.

Then I saw the glacier to which the captain wanted to sail up.

Three men were standing on the glacier; one of them was big and stout, the other lanky, and the third small. Something was moving about on the snow at their feet.

Later I made out a foxy dog with a leg missing.

The ship's bow butted into the glacier. Men sprang down on the ice. They were polarniks who had come to reinforce the staff of the station. The new arrivals heartily greeted the three heroes who had succeeded in setting up the station six months before the *Sedov* called.

It was they who had kept the *Sedov* informed on the state of the ice, guided her and helped her to get through all but impassable ice.

We shook hands with the heroes, who would have been frankly surprised to be called heroes to their faces.

I brought Vanya greetings from someone in the far-away tundra. He blushed with embarrassment.

Mikhail Ivanovich came aboard with us.

"We owe it all to our three-legged Hexa, you know," he said gaily as he sat in the cabin, stroking his long beard. "We'd have starved to death but for her. We saw her run to the wireless mast and start digging the snow. What made her do that? I crawled up to her and lent her a hand. We dug on till we hit on the ridge of a roof. We had been standing right on a house-top! In six years the snow had completely covered up the house. Well, we dug it up. But first we found the door of the storehouse. I wonder where we got the strength to do it from. We opened the door and what should we see in front of us but a fat ham! I took Matvei Sergeyevich's knife and carved off the finest morsel." He smiled. "Matvei Sergeyevich gave it to Hexa."

While Mikhail Ivanovich was telling us his story the crew began to land provisions, cargo and fuel. The wind was snowing over the unloaded boxes.

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## A LAUNCH AT SEA

**T**he wind brought Denisyuk many troubles. The surf at Guessed Island, where he was to work as an aerologist, was so heavy that landing seemed impossible. Because of the late season the *Georgy Sedov* could not wait, the ice threatening to block her way back. Boris Yefimovich, the captain, was compelled for once to give up his usual caution and land the cargo despite the breakers.

I did not know how things were on shore. I just saw men returning in empty kungases. They were soaked to the skin and drank diluted alcohol to get warm. I understood that some of the boxes had to be fished out of the sea.

Unloading went on day and night.

The captain was not sure that he would be able to get all the cargo ashore, so he ordered provisions and fuel to be landed first and the hydrogen cylinders last.

That was where Denisyuk's troubles began. *He* thought the cylinders to be the most valuable cargo. He must have them if he was to fill the balloons to be flown at regular intervals throughout the year. By watching their flight you can determine the speed and direction of wind.

Denisyuk flatly refused to land without the cylinders. I saw him, a huge and clumsy man, sombrely pace the deck, peering at the distant island. It was flat and bare, and the solitary house that stood on it was all but buried in snow.

There was an anxious look on his broad face with the bristly moustache.

He set out for the island when the launch went on its last run, towing the kungas loaded with his "precious" cylinders.

Netayev was at the wheel of the launch. The captain trusted him more and more as the voyage drew to its close. Chief engineer Kartashov replaced the motorman, who had had to work forty-eight hours without sleep.

I realized that the captain attached particular importance to that trip of the launch, because he sent on it his favourite assistants, Netayev and Kartashov.

After the launch pulled away from the ship with the kungas in tow there came a snow "charge" which imperceptibly worked itself into a blizzard. The *Petushok* was lost to view. Everybody felt uneasy. Visibility ended right at the ship's side. The mast-tops could not be seen either. The island had vanished. All ears were strained to catch the chug-chug of the *Petushok's* little diesel, growing fainter and fainter.

Finally it died away.

An hour and a half wore on, yet the launch could not be heard either on board the ship or on the island with which we kept in touch by wireless.

The launch had neither reached the shore nor returned to the ship.

We all tried to picture what was happening to Netayev, Kartashov and Denisjuk, who was all alone in the kungas loaded with the cylinders.

Afterwards we learnt that the engine of the launch went dead when Netayev had already sighted a signal fire built on the shore.

The wheel-house communicated with the engine-room through a voice-pipe.

"What's up?" Netayev shouted into the pipe.

"I'll get her going in a moment," replied Kartashov, a stocky middle-aged seaman.

He was bending over the diesel in the cramped engine-room.

A diesel is started with compressed air. A cylinder of compressed air lay in a special rack that kept it from rolling back and forth. The *Petushok* had lost speed; it no longer obeyed the wheel, and the waves were pounding at its sides.

Kartashov had had a thorough seaman's training. He could do anything with his own hands, a quality which had won him the captain's esteem.

He connected the cylinder and the diesel with a hose and turned the cock of the throttle-valve. The hand of the pressure gauge jumped. The compressed air rushed into the cylinders of the engine.

Kartashov fed fuel—there was a stroke, then another. The diesel chugged, then stopped, then chugged again, and went dead.

"The injector's choked!" Kartashov shouted confidently into the voice-pipe. "Got to clear it."

Netayev, who was at the wheel, tried in vain to turn the launch head on to the waves. The fire on the island was receding fast. Wind and current were driving the launch out into the open sea. Netayev glanced at the compass to ascertain, if only roughly, the trend of his forced course.

Grasping with a sailor's deftness the hand-rail on the engine-room superstructure, Netayev went aft. He did not hurry Kartashov. He fully trusted that experienced man, who spoke and acted with equal assurance.

From the stern the tow-line stretched away into the half-darkness through a wall of whirling snow. The kungas seemed a blurred dark spot.

The waves rolled over the launch. They laid it on its side but it straightened up again and again, as stubbornly as a cork-tumbler.

Wet and sticky, the snow lashed at Netayev's face and got in his eyes.

The square of the hatch lit up. Kartashov stuck his head out of it, with his cap tipped back.

"I'll start her in no time!" he cried encouragingly.

The reassured Netayev went back to the wheel.

Still he felt uneasy. Suppose Kartashov did get the diesel going, which way should they head?

Locating an island in the sea is not easy. It had taken the *Sedov* three days to do so.

The launch had no wireless, no log or chart showing the course. Once a Soviet scientist who studied in Leningrad the route of a ship drifting amid ice-fields had indicated the location of an unknown island. Netayev was now near that island, called Guessed Island, but he did not know how to get there.

The engine was still dead.

"How are you getting on?" Netayev shouted again into the voice-pipe.

There was no reply.

With a foreboding of misfortune Netayev walked out of the wheel-house and looked down into the hatch of the engine-room.

An electric bulb shone dimly on Kartashov's broad back. Kartashov turned round. His usually calm and confident expression was gone. He seemed to be suffering from acute physical pain. He pointed to the hand of the pressure gauge.

"I've spoilt it all," he said in a hollow voice. "There was no air left in the cylinder, the indicator of the gauge got stuck."

Netayev saw sweat drops standing out on Kartashov's wrinkled forehead.

"Can't start her," Kartashov went on in a voice that rang odd to Netayev. "It's my fault. That indicator misled me. What a misfortune, Vanya!" A lump rose to Kartashov's throat.

"There's a man out there in the kungas," said Netayev with unexpected calm. "We must take him aboard. The kungas'll soon sink."

The young mate's calm words sobered up Kartashov. He

frowned, kicked the empty cylinder with his foot and climbed up the ladder after Netayev.

They went aft. Sticky snow and spray came flying from all sides. Water poured in over the tops of their high-boots.

The two seamen got hold of the tow-line and began to pull at it with all their might. Soon a dancing shadow came out of the murky darkness. It was the kungas, with a man looming on its bow.

When the bow of the kungas came alongside the stern of the launch, Netayev shouted, "Jump, Denisyuk! We're going to cut off the tow-line!"

"What d'you mean—cut off?" a voice called back. "Don't you know there are cylinders with hydrogen here?"

"Hang your cylinders!" said Kartashov. "The kungas is going to sink. Can't you see?"

"Sure," replied Denisyuk, "I can see very well. Only how can we give up the cylinders?"

He shouted the words, now rising above the stern, now sinking out of sight.

"Jump!" roared Kartashov, getting angry.

"But I can't fly a single balloon without these cylinders!" Denisyuk protested hoarsely. "That wouldn't do!"

"We can't hold the kungas, it's going to fill up anyway," Netayev tried to explain, checking his anger.

"Why didn't you say so in the first place? Well, look out!"

Something crashed down on deck. Kartashov had just time to jump aside. It was a cylinder thrown from the kungas. The two men found it hard to believe that a cylinder weighing more than a hundred pounds could be tossed over such a distance. But Denisyuk—that huge man who, while in the army, had amazed his comrades of the tank regiment by toying with a seventy-pound dumb-bell—had chosen the moment when the kungas hit the stern of the launch to toss over the cylinder.

"Take them to the bow cabin, Fyodor Mikhailovich," said Netayev to Kartashov, smiling in spite of himself at Kartashov's amazement. "I'll see that they don't roll overboard."



The cylinders, which looked like large-calibre shells, dropped aft one after another. The athlete could be heard wheezing as he lifted them from the bottom of the kungas.

"That's enough, Denisyuk, we can't overload the launch!" Netayev objected hesitantly.

"Don't forget they must last a whole year. Eight cylinders isn't much. Just one more, please!" And without waiting for an answer, Denisyuk threw one more cylinder on deck with a gasp.

Then he jumped over clumsily himself and at once grabbed the hand-rail.

"Rocking like a tank on rugged ground," he muttered. "I feel as rotten as if I'd had a knock on the head."

Netayev swung up an axe and cut off the tow-line. The kungas shot up on a wave-crest and fell away into the darkness.

Denisyuk doubled up on the engine-room superstructure. He apparently felt sick.

"You must work if you feel sick," Netayev suggested sympathetically. "Help the engineer to bail."

Denisyuk, who had thrown steel cylinders a minute before but now was limp and could hardly stand up, lumbered towards the bow cabin.

To enter it he had to pass through the wheel-house.

The sea was roaring in the darkness. It beat furiously at the bulkheads and the door. The water trickled into the cabin from below the panes and across the coamings. It had to be bailed with pails. Denisyuk came to Kartashov's aid. It was a hard job. Because of his height Denisyuk could not unbend, but even so the work was a relief to him.

Kartashov was in a sullen and untalkative mood.

They bailed all night long, but the water-level kept on rising. Towards morning there came a rather strong gale. The position of the launch was becoming critical. It had begun to toss. As if losing the last of its strength, it lay down on its side and scooped water, then darted

upwards as though about to leap clear of the wave-crest, only to plunge down again.

Netayev came down into the bow cabin for a moment.

"Things are in bad shape, Denisyuk," he said. "We can't hold against the seas. And we can't bail out the water either, can we?"

"Well?" Denisyuk paused with the pail in his hand.

"Got to throw those cylinders overboard," said Netayev.

"That wouldn't do, comrades! I'd have nothing to work with for a whole year!"

"Can't be helped," Netayev said with a shrug, as if apologizing.

"But what if we started the diesel?" asked Denisyuk all of a sudden.

"How do you mean?" returned Kartashov.

"Here's compressed gas for you! Two hundred atmospheres." Denisyuk kicked one of the cylinders.

Kartashov gave him a surprised look.

"That's hydrogen," he said weightily.

"What of it?"

"He's crazy!" Kartashov threw down his pail in anger. "Don't you know that hydrogen mixed with air makes detonating gas? If we tried to start the engine with compressed hydrogen we'd certainly blow it up. The launch'd go up in chips!"

"Not at all," said Denisyuk, raising his hand. "You just listen to me. It's a sure thing. We shan't mix hydrogen with air—we'll plug all the suction pipes."

Kartashov shook his head.

"We can't do that, it's too risky." He turned away.

"As you like. Only I won't have my cylinders thrown away."

"What do you say, Fyodor Mikhailovich?" Netayev asked Kartashov.

"Never heard of a thing like that," Kartashov retorted. "I've been an engineer for fifteen years, taught quite a few people. I can't take such a chance."

Netayev fell to thinking. Denisyuk looked at him expectantly. At last Netayev turned to him; his face, usually friendly and cheerful, was haggard.

"Why do you think we may use hydrogen?" he asked, as calmly as before.

"You see, I attended a polytechnical college, only I didn't finish it. Then I was in a tank unit, had a lot to do with tank diesels. When I got back from the army"—Denisyuk looked away—"I found neither home nor family. So I took a course to be able to go to the Arctic. Anyway, I know how to handle a diesel."

"Look here, Denisyuk," said Netayev firmly. "Once I studied diesels at a navigation school, but let's say I know nothing about them and have got to learn everything now. Stand by my side in the house, I must take the wheel. Kartashov's going to pass you the pails from below, you empty them on deck. And tell me everything so that I'll get it straight—all of it!"

Denisyuk gave the rather short Netayev an attentive, respectful look.

"Good," he agreed. "I'll tell you everything."

The waves broke against the glass in bursts of green water. As the launch shot up the men could see the horizon jagged by wave-crests. Then it swept downwards, as if about to capsize, and the men could barely stand on their feet. Stooping by Netayev's side, Denisyuk took the pails of water from Kartashov and emptied them on deck.

"How does a diesel operate? Listen, mate. First the piston slides out of the cylinder and sucks in air from the outside." Denisyuk reached down and took up a pail of water. "That's the intake stroke. Then the piston moves back into the cylinder and compresses the air in it—squeezes it so tight it turns hot. That's the pressure stroke. Now for the third stroke. Liquid fuel is fed through the injector into the cylinder with the hot air. It's ignited and forms gases which force the piston out. That's the power stroke. And then comes the last stroke: the piston moves in again

and pushes out the expanded gases." Denisyuk splashed out the water. "Then the air is sucked in again." He took another pailful of water from Kartashov.

Netayev, pale and tense, held on to the wheel, listening to the unusual lecture. He knew that as things were then the launch could not hold out more than a couple of hours. And how long might it take the *Sedov* to locate the tiny craft in the open sea? By taking a risk they might be able to start the engine and hold their own against the waves—who knew for how long. But what if there were an explosion?

"Now, how's the diesel started? It's quite simple. You shut up the suction pipe." Denisyuk closed the door of the bow cabin. "You start the diesel by hand. The pistons push out all the air that's in the cylinder, but don't suck in any fresh air." Denisyuk splashed out what was left in the pail. "Into the empty cylinder"—he showed Netayev the empty pail—"we let compressed gas instead of fuel. The gas pushes out the piston. The piston slides out of the cylinder, then moves back and squeezes out the expanded gas without compressing, that is, without heating it. Now comes the next intake stroke. The piston ought to suck in air but the suction pipe is plugged. And once again the cylinder is empty." Denisyuk shook the pail. "By that time the power stroke comes again. Again you feed into your cylinder compressed hydrogen instead of fuel. You see now that it doesn't mix up with the outside air. The pail—the cylinder, I mean—is empty. That means there's no detonating mixture. But when you've fed compressed gas into the cylinder several times, when the diesel's started and working, you shut off the compressed hydrogen and open the suction pipe." He swung the door open. "Pass up the pail, Kartashov."

Kartashov stuck his head into the wheel-house.

"Say, Vanya! I'll own that Denisyuk is a half-made technician and I'm just a ship engineer who's learnt his job the hard way. But still can you imagine fooling with hy-

drogen like that? I've known ever since my school days that hydrogen is an explosive. It's for you to decide, Ivan Vasilyevich. You're younger than me, but you're in command here. Now if you ask me"—the old engineer paused for a second and his voice caught—"I don't mind being blown up. I deserve it, too." His voice rang confident again. "I do. It's my fault. Do what you think is best, Vanya."

Netayev went pale but did not say a word. It was up to him to decide. Men's lives and the existence of the little craft depended on whether he had grasped the root of the matter.

Denisyuk and Kartashov were bailing rhythmically. After bailing the water out of the bow cabin they moved to the engine-room and bailed it out of there, then went back to the bow cabin, pouring out the water through the wheel-house.

Netayev, sunk in thought, held on to the wheel.

The gale was raging.

Even the *Sedov* had a hard time because of the roll. Her wireless operator was nearly washed overboard when running to hand the captain a message. He clung to the railing with all his might to keep on deck. Half choked, he tore open the door of the captain's cabin; his smart jacket was dripping.

The captain read the message.

"It isn't flying weather," he said with bitter resentment, put on his overcoat, and mounted the bridge.

He stood on the bridge for hours, sweeping the horizon with his binoculars, although the horizon was so close that there was no need for binoculars.

It was just like the Arctic—nothing but fog and wind.

The deck kept on slipping away underfoot. The wind snatched up foaming wave-crests and threw them high into the air. Even the bridge did not escape the heavy dousings of spray.

The captain combed the sea in a zigzagging course. As she made a tack the ship exposed her side to the waves and scooped water with her deck. Until then the captain had avoided that, fearing that the launch and kungas might be swept overboard. Now he did not care, for there was no launch or kungas on board. The waves rolled easily across the empty deck.

"A plane! A plane!" shouted someone.

The captain spun round. A shapely aeroplane was flying in the low sky.

"So he made it! Baranov made it!" said the captain joyfully. "You can depend on him, all right!" He blinked and took out his handkerchief, apparently to wipe the spray off his face.

The flying boat described a circle over the ship. The seamen tried to make out the flyers' faces in the cockpit but could not. The craft began to fly away from the ship, almost grazing the waves. It disappeared before it reached the horizon.

The seamen saw it twice more as it zigzagged above the sea, and finally received this radiogram: "Launch at sea south-south-west of you."

"Hard to starboard! Snappy!" shouted the captain, waving the slip of paper which was already wet.

The *Sedov* started to put about and scooped water again, but no one heeded it this time.

An hour later the little launch was sighted from the ship. The tiny spot now melted in the fog, now came into view again.

"They keep her head on to the waves," said the captain, peering into his binoculars. "Must've fixed up the diesel."

The men in the launch sighted the ship in their turn. The *Petushok* headed for her—a hardy little craft that leapt from crest to crest.

"That's the spirit! There are brave chaps for you!" cried radiant Boris Yefimovich.

Twenty minutes later the seamen were hugging the courageous three who had saved their own lives and the launch.

"We had to sink so many cylinders!" said Denisjuk unhappily. "Now I'll have to work on a reduced programme the whole year. Well, I'm going to my cabin for a rest. What? Not a sailor's behaviour? That's all right, I'm a shore man, you can have the sea."

"Never mind what he says," remarked Kartashov. "He's a regular seaman."

The table in the saloon was laid to celebrate the return of the three heroes, who had gone without food so long. But the heroes barely got to their cabins, where they instantly fell asleep.

The captain and I walked into the saloon. Katya, the stewardess, was clearing the table as she feared that the plates might break because of the roll.

"I can tell you the story of a splendid New Year's table left untouched," said the captain. "It happened on the Big Land."

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## THE UNTOUCHED TABLE

**T**he captain's narrative reminded me of our call at Thrifty Island.

It would be hard to imagine a more ironical name than that. Indeed, Thrifty Island is a low, barren islet on which even moss does not grow and where stones alone abound. On a patch of rocky sandbank stands a cabin, the one in which Stepan Fyodorovich Kushakov, the first polar-nik to explore and map the Far Land, lived with his comrades.

The *Sedov* called at Thrifty Island to relieve the polar-niks. I visited the station in the company of its chief, Kushakov, who was going to spend another winter on the island. He showed me round with a certain pride.

"Out of this window," he said, "eleven polar bears were killed in one winter. You have no idea how inquisitive bears are. Always trying to get in through the windows."

The room, large but not very cosy, for only men lived in it, was sensibly furnished. The shelves lining the walls were stocked with excellent books.

Kushakov was a tall man; he took down Goncharov's *The Frigate "Pallada"* from the top shelf and handed it to me.

"Here's the writer's autograph," he said, pointing to the first page.

The library had been donated to the polarniks by a Soviet scientist who was a passionate book-lover.



Kushakov took me on a round of what he called his "production shops": the lot with the beehive-like boxes containing various meteorological instruments, the machine-room with petrol runners, the storage-battery room, and the wireless room.

"It's a wonderful spot," he said, meaning Thrifty Island. "A fine place to live in. The landscape's so beautiful all around." He made a sweeping gesture.

I cast a distrustful glance at the rocky ridge of the island.

Kushakov grinned.

"You doubt it? Come along, I'll show you." He led me to the ridge.

The stones crunched under our feet. I watched my companion who had taken off his cap, feeling hot. He had close-cropped hair, an angular forehead above beetling eyebrows, gay eyes slightly screwed up, prominent cheek-bones, and a rather heavy chin. His movements were deliberate. Probably he never was in a hurry.

I knew him to have lived for some fifteen years in the Arctic, where he had visited nearly all the islands.

"During the first month of my holidays," he said as we walked on, "I go to the theatres—can't have my fill of it. The second month I spend in the south. Lie there under palm-trees. The heat almost kills me, but I bear it to store up warmth. As to the third month, I simply don't know how to spend it. I get so lonely I could howl. That's when I feel like giving a year's extra pay for a handful of snow. Once I even joined a bunch of mountain-climbers to see some ice. And when I get back to the Arctic and see these expanses my heart stops beating." He made the sweeping gesture again.

We were now on the ridge which offered a view of the broken ice-field below.

Lit up by the sun, it was an amazing sight. The broken ice glistened. I thought I saw a plain strewn with precious stones, displaying blue, greenish and dazzling white colours.

I could see, stretching away to the horizon, traces of the struggle of titanic forces that had broken up the white plain and raised here and there shapeless ice-packs with facets glittering like diamond.

"What might!" I could not help exclaiming.

Kushakov became thoughtful, then he said, "It's for this beauty and might and the polar bears that try to get in through windows that I love the Arctic."

And now I heard from the captain about Kushakov, Thrifty Island and that distant corner of the Big Land where people had got together to celebrate New Year.

Two snow-white cloths covered the extended dinner table and the desk that had been moved up to it. The centre of the combined table was set with dishes holding a crab salad in sour cream, opened tins of sardines and sprats in oil, plates laid with fine slices of many kinds of smoked and boiled sausage, and plates with pink, white-rimmed pieces of the juicy ham which adorned one end of the table. Close by was a dish with slices of delicate salmon that melted in your mouth, small bowls with black caviare and large ones with ruddy apples, heavy pears and clusters of grapes, which are so rare in the Arctic.

Rising above the table like so many mute guards were big bottles, pot-bellied and cut-glass decanters reflecting hundreds of electric lights, and small bottles with tempting labels, surrounded by sets of large transparent wine-glasses and small ones on slender stems, ready for action, and also by tiny tumblers that are usually overlooked on a well-loaded table.

Yelena Alexandrovna Zagorova, the mistress of the house, was still young, with a fine profile and dark hair done in a bun on the back of her neck. Wearing the uniform of a captain of the medical corps, she was busy decorating the table with a large vase of chrysanthemums of a most delicate violet hue. Fresh flowers north of the Polar Circle on

New Year's eve! She wished the coming year to be as radiant and beautiful as those flowers.

She glanced gratefully at her father who had brought the flowers and fruit from Moscow by air that morning. At the airfield he had impetuously put his arms around her and said in his habitually imperious voice, "Well, Lena, I quarrelled with a lot of people at the ministry. The matter almost reached the minister. But I had it my way! I'm going to live here till summer. I've laid aside all my duties. What I need is quiet—the Arctic kind!"

She knew that in the Arctic her father planned to finish a major work. He, Professor Polyakov, wanted to sum up the experience acquired over many years in the treatment of ear, nose and throat diseases.

Just then he was pacing his daughter's flat, looking narrowly at the tempting dishes and bottles and rubbing his hands. He was rather short and spare; his greying tow hair and fair moustache were neatly trimmed.

Major Zagorov, commander of a squadron of the naval air force, exchanged a look of mutual understanding with his father-in-law. He was a heavyish man of athletic build, with the deliberate movements of one used to calculating them.

The bell rang and the host went to open. He came back with Rear-Admiral Frolov, whom he introduced to the professor.

A hum of voices came from the passage where naval officers were taking off their coats. Their wives, who had arrived earlier, were trimming themselves in Yelena Alexandrovna's room.

"We're going to be short of ladies this time, too," said Yelena Alexandrovna with a smile at stocky Frolov.

"We'll see that nobody disturbs you here," said Frolov to the professor. "It's quiet here anyway. Occasionally we even feel bored."

"I don't know what boredom is like, I really don't," said the professor quickly. "Do *you* ever have a chance to be bored, Comrade Rear-Admiral?"

Frolov smiled with the corners of his mouth and eyes. He had a pock-marked intelligent face.

"To tell the truth, I don't."

"You only feel bored if you don't know how to use your energy. If I were to find myself on an uninhabited island I'd only feel melancholy because of lack of patients."

The rear-admiral suddenly broke into thunderous laughter, the laughter of a healthy and ingenuous man.

More guests came in. The dining-room filled with noise. Frolov glanced at his watch.

"Twelve minutes past eleven."

The bell rang in the passage.

"Who can that be?" said Zagorov. "Nobody's missing."

He went out. Those in the dining-room could hear his booming bass voice. "On a day like this—you're crazy! Not for the world!"

Thinking that he was wanted on some urgent business, Frolov got up and quietly walked out of the room.

A shortish seaman of the Arctic fleet, as the emblem on his fur cap indicated, was standing in the passage. On his sleeve were four chevrons.

"Good evening, captain! What's the matter?" asked Frolov, shaking hands with the new-comer.

Zagorov stepped in.

"This is what we'll do, captain. Please take off your coat. You're going to celebrate New Year with us. We'll talk later."

"Make yourself at home, Boris Yefimovich," said Frolov. "The officers will be honoured by the company of the *Sedov's* captain."

"This is no time for celebrating, Nikolai Stepanovich," said Boris Yefimovich. "I was told that a famous professor was here with you. His advice is urgently needed."

Yelena Alexandrovna was standing in the doorway.

"Advice from Father? He'll never consent!"

"I beg not to believe you," said the captain of the *Sedov* in a resolute tone. "Being a doctor yourself, you'll understand. I represent the Northern Sea Route administration here while the *Sedov* lies at anchor. There's trouble on Thrifty Island. The chief of the polar station has been taken ill. They consulted the doctor on Bleak Island. They fear it's serious. Just think whose life is at stake! It was he, Stepan Fyodorovich Kushakov, who explored polar lands and got down to some of the richest deposits. Mapped it all, too. He's the best geologist and seaman up here in the North. Wants to build towns with asphalted streets here, and even health resorts. A man of rare qualities. Served as a lieutenant in the Navy." Boris Yefimovich glanced at Frolov.

"But what's happened to him?" asked the hostess.

"A polar bear seldom attacks people, but this time it hit Stepan Fyodorovich hard, at close quarters. I wonder how he managed to shoot it down. Things've been going from bad to worse ever since. The man's dying. The Bleak Island doctor says some prominent ENT specialist should be consulted by wireless. It's already night over in Moscow, they're celebrating there, and tomorrow's a holiday."

"I am an ENT specialist. Only, since Father's here—" Yelena Alexandrovna was embarrassed. "But we couldn't let Father go with you tonight."

"We'll do it this way," said Frolov, stepping in with determination. "I'll tell my wireless operators to communicate with Thrifty Island and connect the Zagorovs' home with it. I'm sure the professor here won't refuse his help."

Boris Yefimovich rejoiced.

"Thank you so much," he said, taking off his overcoat with Zagorov's help.

"Come in, please do come in," said the hostess. "It's wonderful you're going to celebrate New Year with us!"

The rear-admiral went to the telephone. The noise in the

dining-room died down at once; everybody felt that something unusual had happened.

As soon as he learnt what the matter was, the professor sat down in an arm-chair by the telephone and quietly put a few questions to the *Sedov's* captain.

"Did you say it happened three weeks ago?"

Boris Yefimovich nodded.

He felt ill at ease.

"That's right. Frolov speaking," the rear-admiral said over the telephone. "Hurry up, get in touch with them. I'm waiting. But how long must I wait?"

The others stood in a semicircle around those sitting by the telephone.

Yelena Alexandrovna came up to her father and put her arms around his shoulders.

"Yes, yes! Professor Polyanov is here, at the microphone!" Frolov shouted into the receiver. "Can't you tune in better than that? What? You can't hear well? You never can when I have to talk to somebody. Last time I could hardly hear Vladivostok. At the world's end, is it? But that's what wireless was invented for! What? Thrifty Island? Good. I'm passing the receiver to Professor Polyanov. Tell him what happened."

He handed the receiver to the professor.

"What? How's that? Can't hear a thing," said the professor in an annoyed voice, half rising from his arm-chair. "How am I going to advise them if I can't make out a single word?"

"You just aren't used to it, Dad. Here, give me the receiver. I'm going to pass on your questions and answers."

"Do you really think you'll be able to hear? As an ENT specialist I'll investigate your sensitive hearing apparatus."

Yelena Alexandrovna took over the receiver.

"Hallo, Thrifty Island!" she said in a low but clear voice. "I shall ask you questions for the professor.

"Did the patient lose consciousness after he was struck in the region of the ear?"

Yelena Alexandrovna repeated the professor's question and at once replied, "He was found unconscious an hour later, near the killed bear. He had fired the moment he was hit. The bear attacked him unexpectedly when he went out to the storehouse to get some cartridges to shoot seal. The dogs had nothing to eat."

"That has no bearing on the diagnosis," grumbled the professor. "Was there any haemorrhage? How large is the wound? Any temperature?"

Yelena Alexandrovna told him that the helix was torn, a lacerated wound stretched to the back of the neck, and part of the scalp was torn off. The temperature was a hundred and two."

"His pulse? What treatment was he given? Have they a doctor there?"

"There's no doctor. The Bleak Island doctor suggested a sulphidin dressing and hasn't allowed him to rise from bed for three weeks."

"That's good," said the professor.

"Did he have nausea or vomit?" asked Yelena Alexandrovna.

"I don't think I've had a chance to ask that yet," said the professor testily. "However—it happens to be very important."

"At first he didn't," was the reply, "but during the last three days he has. Nausea gets stronger when he turns his head. His ear bled at first, now it's suppurating."

The professor shook his head.

"Tell them to show the patient a tea-cup and ask him what it is," he suggested.

Those around him started a surprised whispering.

Yelena Alexandrovna passed on what she was told to.

"They haven't got any cups, just a tin mug," she said.

In the hush that fell everyone pictured the mug being brought to the patient, who must be lying on bear-skins.

"They showed him the mug. He says, 'That is to drink out of.'"

"Good," said the professor, taking off his spectacles and wiping them with his handkerchief; his eyes turned out to be of an azure or rather deep-blue colour. "Let them show him a watch."

"He says, 'That is for—time.'"

"A sugar-bowl? Have they got one?" the professor went on to ask, putting on his spectacles and glancing over the table laid to celebrate New Year.

"No."

"What about a vodka bottle? Let them show one to the patient."

"He's sure to recognize *that*," whispered Zagorov.

"They've got alcohol. They showed the patient a bottle of alcohol. He said, 'That is for bitter—it burns.'"

"I see," said the professor. "Give the patient my thanks."

"May I tell them to switch off?" asked Frolov as he took the receiver from Yelena Alexandrovna.

The professor nodded and then said to his daughter, "It's amnesic aphasia. Occurs with cerebral abscesses, when the left temporal lobe is affected. Was he hit on the left ear?"

"Yes," said Boris Yefimovich.

"What now?" asked the rear-admiral.

"It's very bad," said the professor. "Death is inevitable unless—"

"Unless what?" the captain and Frolov asked as one man.

The captain's furrowed, weather-beaten face and Frolov's slightly pock-marked face were equally tense.

"—unless he's immediately trephined."

"He needs an urgent operation," put in Yelena Alexandrovna.

"It can't be done," said Boris Yefimovich with a sigh. "No ship can make her way to the island before August. No plane can land now either on the island or near it."

"That means he's doomed?" asked Frolov.

"I don't know, I'm not a polarnik," replied the professor angrily. "It isn't for me to judge whether a surgeon capa-



ble of performing this very difficult operation can be taken to the island, but he's indispensable there."

Boris Yefimovich propped his elbows on his knees and rested his greying head upon them.

"What a man he was, comrades! What a loss!"

"Not only for polarniks," added Frolov, "but for us, too."

Yelena Alexandrovna picked up a napkin from the table and began to crumple it in her hands.

"Vasya," she said softly to her husband, "could anybody fly to the island in the Arctic night? Could *you*?"

"Yes."

"Nikolai Stepanovich . . . Comrade Rear-Admiral, I mean," said Yelena Alexandrovna, stepping up to Frolov and standing at attention, "Kushakov can be saved if a surgeon is landed by parachute."

"By parachute?" asked the professor, raising his eyebrows.

"What are you talking about!" Boris Yefimovich cut in. "Tomorrow's a holiday in Moscow. We can't have anyone before the day after. Besides, is there a specialist who can also handle a parachute?"

"I've handled one, Comrade Rear-Admiral. If you ordered a flyer—Major Zagorov—to take me to the island I would jump."

"You?" exclaimed Zagorov in spite of himself. "What about our little one?"

There was a hubbub in the dining-room. Frolov rose. Although he was not tall, just then he did look tall and sturdily built. He was expected to decide.

"It's praiseworthy, to be sure," said the professor. "Very praiseworthy indeed. But may I ask the captain of the medical corps here a question? Have you ever performed such an operation, captain?"

"No, Dad, I haven't. But you'll teach me. Tell me, Dad, could you teach me tonight?"

"I?" The professor sat back in his arm-chair. "So you

want your husband to fly you and your father to teach you, eh?"

"Is that really possible?" asked Frolov.

The embarrassed professor took off his spectacles to wipe them.

"Yes, of course, but—"

"What do you need to do it?" asked Frolov quickly.

"Two or three cadavers. Yes. Two or three cadavers. We could try the operation on them tonight."

"Comrade Lieutenant," said Frolov, speaking to a young officer, "ring up the morgue, and the hospital, too. Right away!"

"May I go ahead with the preparations?" asked Zagorov, stepping forward.

"Wait," said Frolov; but Zagorov went out.

The lieutenant soon had the necessary information.

"Report," ordered Frolov, who was walking up and down by the table with his hands behind his back.

"No cadavers, Comrade Rear-Admiral," said the young officer in a clear voice. "Nobody died on New Year's eve."

"That's that," said the professor.

Zagorov came back wearing his flying kit and high dog-skin boots.

"Go and change, Major Zagorov," said Frolov. "Everything's off."

"Why?" asked the professor, rising solemnly from his arm-chair. "I shall fly to the island!"

"You, Dad? How can you?" cried the terrified Yelena Alexandrovna.

"Who would permit that?" asked Frolov blandly.

"What do you mean?" the professor retorted. "I've been relieved of all my duties till next autumn! There's no quieter place than that far-away island. I'll finish my book there and a ship will call for me next autumn."

Boris Yefimovich had straightened up and was looking at the professor with admiration. Frolov was silent.

"Damn it!" cried the professor. "Why was nobody afraid when I flew here? That was an Arctic flight too, wasn't it? Why were you willing to let my daughter jump, though as a surgeon she has less experience than I? I was ready to instruct her, but you can't send her untrained and that means *I* must parachute. That's a physician's duty—and a Soviet man's."

"Excuse me, professor," Zagorov interrupted him, "but have you ever used a parachute?"

"No, I haven't."

Zagorov made a cautious attempt to dissuade him.

"Don't you know you must train first, just as in the case of an operation?"

"That's quite a different thing! Mustn't I make a first jump when training?"

"Of course you must."

"Well, why can't I make my first jump over the island just as well? It's easier to pull a ring than perform a brain operation. Don't you ever parachute loads in sacks? I'm no worse than a sack, am I? It's settled! I'll argue no more. Just try to understand, I realize full well what a physician has to do in my stead. The physician's title is one to be proud of. Whoever takes it swears to his people not to spare his life in fulfilling his duty. That's what the army and navy regulations say, too, as far as I know."

"You're right, professor," said Frolov, grasping his hand. "But now may I ask a few questions?"

"Please do."

"How old are you? What is your blood pressure? Is your heart in good condition? How are your nerves?"

"I'm a surgeon, Comrade Rear-Admiral. My hand never shook, though I'm fifty-four now."

"Even so, professor, your daughter will please sound you and report to me."

"May I start getting the plane ready, Comrade Rear-Admiral?" asked Zagorov.

"Go ahead, Major Zagorov. By the way, comrades, flyers never drink before a flight. It would be uncomradely of us to touch this table before the plane gets back."

"Hear, hear!" said the guests in unison.

The clock pointed to a quarter past twelve. Nobody had noticed the coming of the new year.

The guests left. Yelena Alexandrovna wandered about the empty house alone. Sometimes she stopped in front of the untouched table, shifted some napkins or covered up the slices of sausage or ham with an overturned plate, drew a sigh, and stared at the frozen window-pane. Somewhere out in the night an aeroplane was flying away with two men she loved most.

Frolov was dozing in the arm-chair by the telephone. No sooner did the telephone ring than he snatched up the receiver.

"Frolov speaking. What? The professor has parachuted? Polarniks found him a hundred yards from the house? Thank you, my friend! Thank you for doing your duty so well! I commend you for exemplary communication. Lena! Did you hear? Come here, let me embrace you! Vasya's coming back. He'll be here soon. I'm going to tell everybody to get together again. The table's waiting!"

The captain of the medical corps leaned her head against the rear-admiral's chest and cried.

New Year was celebrated on the night of January 1.

On the sumptuous table there stood—besides the bottles of wine and the hors d'oeuvres on which Frolov exercised his wit—steaming pots of Siberian *pelmeni*.

When Major Zagorov rose from his seat all the others did the same.

"I think a surgeon alone can show such self-control," he said. "We flyers can learn a lot from him!"

Yelena Alexandrovna came in. She had changed from her uniform to an elegant silk dress that made her look quite young.

"The operation was a success, comrades," she announced in a ringing voice, "a brilliant success!"

"May I offer a toast," said Frolov, "to our excellent people each of whom is capable of performing an exploit for his fellow-men and his country. Let those who feel like breaking peace tremble at these peaceful exploits of our people!"

A January gale was raging in the Barents Sea.

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## AN IVORY PLATE

**T**he roll was terrific in the Barents Sea. I was utterly unable to rise from my berth. My body now tossed aloft, now sank into an abyss. There was a lump in my throat and I could not help clenching my teeth.

And yet I had to go to the saloon. Boris Yefimovich, the captain, insisted on all the passengers appearing for lunch without fail.

The deck heeled and sank away under my feet. An impenetrable fog hung around the ship. Although bound for *Novaya Zemlya*, the captain had purposely moved farther away from it. He remained true to his nature—always deliberate and biding his time—but contrived nevertheless to do more during each run than any other captain.

When I at last reached the saloon the captain was sitting at the head of the table, looking smart and friendly as usual. He greeted me with a gay, slightly mocking glance. I could take comfort in the fact that while one side of the table was taken up by cheerful seamen, the passengers sitting on the other side were as seasick and miserable as myself.

"Is there really no remedy for seasickness?" I asked the doctor, and cast a horrified side glance at the seamen falling to the food, which just then I loathed.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"There *is* one," answered the captain instead of him. "We seamen try to work harder."

"Use us as stokers!" I implored him.

"I'll remember that, so look out!" said the captain, and suddenly asked, "Who can play chess here?"

Everybody turned out to know the game, except chief engineer Kartashov.

"Why don't you start a tournament?" the captain suggested.

"Talk of games!" said the second mate scornfully, looking at our livid faces.

"You're wrong," the captain said earnestly. "Chess means a lot to us polarniks. It helps us in the most difficult situations. Think of the Chelyuskinites. Their ship was crushed and sank. They were left on bare ice, thousands of miles from habitation. Planes were hardly used in the Arctic at the time. But the Chelyuskinites held a chess tournament out there on the ice. Nobody could've played chess then if he hadn't been sure that his country would help him out. And it did. They just had time enough to finish the tournament.

"So let's talk about chess." The captain smiled mysteriously. "It's become an Arctic game. Chess contests between islands are frequent now. But the game was known in far-away India ages ago. Recently I had a chance to find that out myself."

"When was that?" asked the first mate. "Was it when we were running that merchant ship to the Far East?"

"Yes. We had to get her from Arkhangelsk to Vladivostok before the Arctic navigation season was in," answered the captain. "The task was assigned to me. It was an interesting route—via Gibraltar and the Suez Canal. We had a chance to put into Calcutta. Towards evening I went ashore and paid a visit to the port authorities, then strolled about the city. The port's an ordinary one, with long, squat warehouses. The streets are asphalted, the houses and cars like those in Europe.

"I was struck by the variety of costume. What I mean is not elegant variety but variety of contrast. Europeans in

white suits and topees and half-naked men in rags, lean, with big black eyes. Sluggish passers-by in turbans, noisy soldiers in berets and khaki tunics.

"I wanted to buy an Indian souvenir and stopped in front of a shop-window. But there was only cheap stuff in it, of foreign make.

"People in the streets of Calcutta walk slowly and stop often, as though they are never in a hurry. It's because of the heat, I'm sure.

"At first I didn't pay any attention to a poorly dressed Indian who stopped many passers-by and offered them a fountain-pen. I thought at first he was trying to sell it. One of the passers-by took it. The Indian held out a book and the man wrote something on a sheet of paper.

"The Indian came up to me, literally seared me with a look of his coal-black eyes, and said in English, 'All people must fight against war, sailor. Sign this appeal.'

"So that was what he held out the fountain-pen for!

"I smiled and answered him in the same language, 'Thank you for asking me, but I've already signed it.' 'You have?' he said in surprise, or rather with joy. 'But where?' 'In Leningrad,' I answered.

"He seemed transformed, as if he'd recognized an old acquaintance. He gripped my hand and looked into my eyes and smiled.

" 'Are you a Russian?' he asked excitedly. 'A Soviet man? I'm so glad to meet you! We think of your country so often. You're the first Soviet man I've seen. I'd like to—please accept this souvenir. It bears signs of great wisdom. Symbols of the laws of changes. It was found by archaeologists.'

"He thrust into my hand an ivory plate with some designs engraved on it.

"It was a fine specimen of ancient craftsmanship. How unexpectedly my wish was fulfilled!

"The Indian said good-bye to me. I walked to the pier where the launch was waiting to take me to the ship.

"Before rounding the corner I looked back.



"The Indian had stopped a group of passers-by and was talking to them excitedly. There were two soldiers in berets in the group. The Indian held out the pen. Someone took it. Others signed the appeal after him.

"I had to hurry to the pier. In my pocket I felt the thin ivory plate."

"What were the designs on the plate?" asked the second mate.

"That's just why I started my story. You see, chess has long been a sort of international language. It comes from ancient India. My plate was inlaid with gold, but the pattern wasn't an inscription. What it represented was a chess-board."

"Where's the plate now?" we asked.

The captain smiled slyly.

"I may have sent it to scientists in Moscow. It must certainly have been of interest. But I can reproduce the designs on it if you like."

"Do please!" we cried.

Someone got a sheet of paper. The captain neatly drew four chess-boards on it. On two of them he drew a few straight lines and on the other two he carefully drew chess-men.

"This is what was engraved on the Indian ivory plate. I sat over these figures for many nights but couldn't solve their mystery. And yet the Indian had told me about some marvellous ancient wisdom contained in the designs. Now perhaps there's someone among you who can solve the riddle?"

All of us at once set about copying the mysterious designs. Everyone had made up his mind to solve the mystery of the Indian plate at any price.

Two of the figures were absolutely incomprehensible. Why were those lines drawn across the chess-board? What might they stand for?

The other two drawings doubtless represented positions in two different chess games. In the first game White was

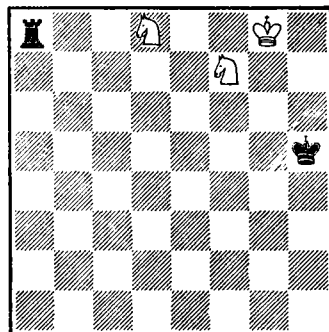
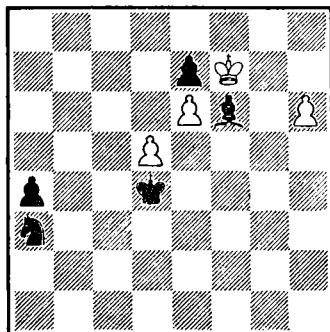
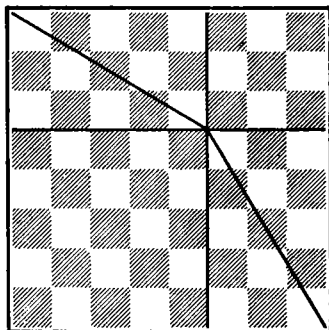
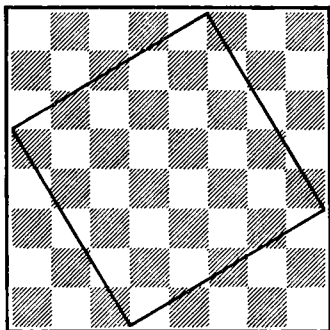
losing. His King had not a single man to defend him while Black had a Bishop and a Knight plus a very strong passed Pawn. The second game was bound to be a draw. Black had a Rook against two tied Knights. It struck me that in the two positions no two pieces were alike except the Kings.

I sat over the Indian mystery till supper-time.

The saloon had not witnessed such a noisy gathering for quite a long time. Everybody was talking about the mysterious figures.

As Kartashov was late for supper the captain sent Katya, the stewardess, for him. Incidentally, she suffered terribly from seasickness.

Kartashov rushed into the saloon.



"I've solved it!" he cried.

"You'll tell us after supper," said the captain, raising his hand.

Kartashov fell to with appetite.

"I'll admit that I'm not very learned. I'm a man of practice," he said, stowing away the meal. "But I think it's brilliant. I'd say it was a real contribution to science!"

"But you can't play chess, can you?" exclaimed the doctor.

"No need for that," answered Kartashov imperturbably.

We finished our meal in no time. The seas roared outside, tossing the ship from side to side, as we crowded round Kartashov to hear what he had to tell us.

"See what's in the first figure? A square. Its angles touch the sides of the chess-board. What does the whole area of the chess-board consist of? It's divided into this square and four equal right-angled triangles. Do you see the triangles? They're in the corners."

"Yes! Yes!" we cried.

"Now look at the second design. Do you see the same triangles here?"

"No. Where are they?"

"They touch each other with their hypotenuses—in pairs."

"Yes. That's right."

"The triangles are exactly the same and that means they are equal in area. Consequently the area not covered by the triangles in the second figure is the same as in the first."

"Of course it is!"

"But look what it consists of. What are these squares?" asked Kartashov slyly. "One of them, the smaller one, is erected on the small side and the other, the larger one, on the big side. Now look at the square in the first design. What is it erected on?"

"Hell!" cried the doctor. "It's on the hypotenuse!"

"That means the area of the square in the first design is equal to the areas of the two squares in the second design, Right?" Kartashov swept us with a triumphant gaze.

"The square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the sides!" I muttered, flabbergasted.

"I've never heard of such a demonstration of the Pythagorean Proposition!" said the second mate, delighted.

"It always seemed to me difficult to demonstrate that theorem," the doctor admitted.

"Yes," said a professor who was going on a geographical expedition and had said nothing till then, "I think this ancient Indian wisdom is superior to the demonstration by the famous Greek mathematician. It is almost a discovery."

We raised an enthusiastic hubbub and suddenly noticed that the captain was gone. Kartashov was sent to the bridge to report his discovery.

I went back to my cabin but could not think of sleep. My suit-case was again trying to jump out from under the berth, but I did not care. I pictured the mysterious ivory plate, the Indian—he was dark, with a narrow face and piercing eyes—and the designs of that brilliant mathematician of antiquity who had solved geometrical problems, perhaps long before Pythagoras, by a simpler and more ingenious method than all the later generations.

But what were those chess problems placed by the ancient mathematician next to his remarkable demonstration? How highly he must have esteemed the ancient game to put it on an equal footing with geometry!

I sat over the Indian chess problems till morning, then on throughout the following day and night.

And I succeeded in solving the Indian mystery.

A whole world of struggle, surprises, striking effects, shrewdness, daring, precise calculation, and subtlety opened up before me.

My report on the solution of the Indian mystery caused a stir. My audience included those who could play chess as well as those who could not. I had promised a solution that would be equally interesting for all.

The saloon was packed full.

The captain was the only person missing; he was on the bridge as usual. The ship was carefully nosing her way to Novaya Zemlya. Cape Desire, as Barents had named it to mark his ardent and unfulfilled desire to break through the ice to the east, was left to the north of us. Fog still hid the coast.

I looked over the gathering.

"In the first position Black is much stronger. White is in a hopeless position. Isn't he?"

Everybody agreed with me.

"Nevertheless, White makes it a draw!"

"Impossible!" exclaimed those who could play, amazed, while those who could not urged me to make haste about revealing the secret of the ivory plate.

I began excitedly to demonstrate the solution of that marvellous problem. Even non-players looked on with deep attention.

They saw White's Pawn rush ahead and on reaching the eighth rank suddenly turn into a Knight instead of a Queen.

They saw Black sacrifice his Bishop in the corner in order to queen his Pawn more quickly. But White's wily, reborn Knight placed himself in such a way that, to avoid a draw, Black was compelled to change his Pawn into a Rook, not a Queen.

A duel began between the Rook and the Knight, breathlessly watched by all. Just when the game seemed to be up for White, his last Pawn turned into another Knight instead of a Queen.

"Now it's a draw," I assured everyone. "Black's Rook can't win against White's two Knights. Look at the final position and at the ivory plate!"\*

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\* Here is the solution for the benefit of those familiar with the game:

1. P—Q6, Kt—Kt4; 2. P x P, K—K4. Black awaits the appearance of White's Queen to destroy her, but—3. P—K8—Kt! A new hero—the real hero of the coming fight—steps in. 3. ... B—R1. 4. P—R7, P—R6. 5. K—Kt8, in order to get the Bishop out of the

"But that's the second position! It's derived from the first! It seemed impossible!" voices rang out from all sides.

"All the pieces are changed except the Kings."

And so it was. By force of absolute logic, like that applied in the Indian demonstration of the Pythagorean Proposition, everything had changed on the board. The original pieces had disappeared as by magic and others had emerged to replace them in a new, equal alignment of forces.

Everyone noisily voiced his admiration of the idea of the unknown chess enthusiast.

Looking up from the board, we saw the captain. He was smiling at us.

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Pawn's way. Black allows it, having decided to ensnare his adversary. 5. . . . K x P. 6. K x B. K—B2! Presto! Black has carried out his design. But all of a sudden White's Knight goes into action. 7. K x Q6+! He may not be taken, or White will be stalemated. But Black is so strong he can even give up his Knight and irresistibly push his Pawn through to the eighth rank. 7. . . . K—B1. 8. Kt x Kt, P—R7. 9. K—Q4! A shrewd Knight! He has placed himself in such a way that Black cannot make a Queen, or White will be stalemated again. But instead of a Queen, Black makes a Rook. 9. . . . P—R8—R! A new long-range fighter, more powerful than the Knight, goes into action. But White's Knight does not waste time. 10. Kt—K6+, K—B2. 11. Kt—Q8+, K—Kt3! Black has made up his mind. To put off pursuit he lets White's King go. He has foreseen the remote finale. Let White do what he is so eager to do—advance his Pawn to the eighth rank. He will be mated the moment he celebrates the Queen's birth. But in a fight the winner is the one who has calculated one move further. 12. K—Kt8, R—R1. Black raises his hand to strike the final blow. Black's Rook will counter the emergence of White's Queen by taking the Knight and mating White! But White again refrains from choosing that powerful piece and makes a second Knight instead. 13. P—R8—Kt+! The hand raised to strike is checked. The King is forced to retreat. 13. . . . K—R4. 14. Kt—B7! The two Knights are planted immovably. Drawn.

Black could have started the game with 1. . . . Kt—B5. 2. P x P, K—K4. 3. P—K8—Kt, B—R1. 4. P—R7! P—R6. 5. K—Kt8, K x P. 6. K x B, K—B2. 7. Kt—Q6+, K—B1. 8. Kt x Kt, P—R7. 9. Kt—K5!! P—R8—R. 10. Kt—Q7+, K—B2. 11. Kt—K5+, K—B3. 12. Kt—Q7+. Black cannot get away from permanent check. Drawn!

"Captain!" cried the doctor. "We thank you for the wonderful Indian creations in mathematics and chess. It's real poetry!"

"Just a moment," I interrupted him. "There's one secret here that hasn't been revealed yet."

"One more secret?" everybody, including the captain, asked in surprise.

"Yes. The fact is, I'm prepared to prove that there was no ivory plate at all!"

"What do you mean?" asked the whole gathering indignantly.

"Just what I say," I insisted. "What we must admire is the subtle imagination of our captain here, a composer of end-game studies. I hadn't the slightest idea that he was that same expert in end-games whose creations I had admired so often."

The captain laughed. Seamen and polarniks stared at him in amazement.

"Not a bad remedy for seasickness, is it?" he asked.

"For seasickness?" We looked at each other.

"It's true! We quite forgot it!"

"But how did you guess it?" asked the captain, speaking to me.

"It was simple enough. Black couldn't make a Queen for fear of tying up White's Knight and thus stalemating him."

"Exactly."

"But then, in ancient India, the Queen couldn't move so far as it does today."

"No, she couldn't." Boris Yefimovich laughed again. "I quite forgot about that improvement in chess."

"And here's the last secret of the plate. It didn't exist!"

"You're wrong. It isn't a question of chess. The plate does exist." The captain produced a small white plate from an inner pocket of his jacket.

We inspected it with curiosity. An ivory plate inlaid with gold! Mysterious designs. Two of them were familiar to us; they were the Indian demonstration of the Pythagorean

Proposition. But the other two had nothing to do with chess. One of them was an outline map of India with two daggers crossed upon it. The other bore the same map, but it served as a background for two hands clasped in a friendly grip.

"This is what the Indian presented me with. The designs mean that genuine wisdom lies in friendship among the peoples of India, not in their mutual enmity. It was under the impression of these designs that I composed my end-game."

"But what about the Pythagorean Proposition?" asked Kartashov.

"I had heard about it before. The demonstration was unearthed in the course of excavations. Leo Tolstoy used to enjoy it. Please forgive me the joke, but it helped you get rid of your seasickness. Whenever you want to get over it you must find some such occupation as will absorb you completely. Well, I must be going to the bridge. The fog is thinning out."

We went out on deck and saw mountains on the horizon. A mysterious land, so unlike other lands in the Arctic!

"Hard to port!" the captain commanded.



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## HARD TO PORT!

**W**e had yet to put into Harbour Bay, one of the most beautiful spots in the Arctic.

The cloud-like mountains we had sighted on the horizon were now growing and rising higher. We were drawing near the last Arctic land on our route.

Netayev was off duty and we decided to go ashore together.

The ship sailed up to the stern rocky mountains, hoary with snow.

Harbour Bay nestled against their foot.

A black rocky island lay like a fort at the entrance to the bay. Slightly to the left of it, where the waves broke on invisible reefs, white pillars of foam rose aloft.

Boris Yefimovich could have worked as a pilot in any bay of the North. He confidently steered the ship along a narrow, unmarked fairway.

Water gushed up close by the ship's side. I had momentary glimpses of black rocks in the water—they looked like glossy-skinned sea animals.

The powerful grey cliffs were bare and inaccessible. Nothing grew on them. The little houses of a trading station stood on the shore to the left of us and those of the polar station, to our right.

A small launch cast off from the shore and headed for the ship.

But what was that mottled strip stretching down into the sea from a cleft?

"It's a glacier," Netayev told me.

What a strange glacier! It did not resemble any of the smooth, snow-covered glaciers we had come across before. Only where an iceberg had broken off could we see the rugged wall of greenish ice.

"We'll have a chance to see it at close quarters," Netayev promised me.

The launch took us to a narrow spit separating the larger bay from the small one.

We set out for the glacier, which slid down into the small bay. The thin snow showed our footprints.

On climbing atop of the spit we saw the bay and stopped in surprise. What was that?

Strange ice-floes of the most unusual shades—green, bright blue, azure, white, and even black—were afloat on the calm surface of the water. Their shapes were as much out of the ordinary as their colours.

I wondered where they had come from.

"The ice breaks off in slabs from the glacier and falls into the water," said Netayev.

From high up we had a good view of the whole glacier; ribbed like a heating radiator, it consisted throughout of vertical, rugged slabs of various colours, frozen together. A motley ice river slid down from above.

As we drew nearer we saw the extremity of the glacier overhanging the sea.

There was a booming blow.

"The glacier's 'calved,'" said Netayev.

One of the upright slabs had broken off and dropped into the water. The new-born ice "calf," as polarniks call it, sank into the sea, only to re-emerge the next moment.

Some of the coloured ice-floes had been washed ashore. We examined them with curiosity. They were as transparent as glass and lacked the colour they had seemed to have when seen from afar. But inside the ice we could make out

a multitude of grains, apparently of coloured sand. It was they that imparted to the ice-blocks their unusual appearance.

"Curious," said Netayev, shaking his head. "It looks as if the glacier up there were made up of different streams of ice."

"And each stream had a colour of its own?"

"Perhaps each little ice stream glides over clay of a different colour and in that way clay particles get into the ice. Look." Netayev pointed to the floe we had just been scanning.

But I looked at him instead. His blue eyes were dilated with joy and his face was beaming.

"It was to see wonders like these that I became a seaman," he said all of a sudden. "I love the sea. But I love the coast better still. The things you see on it! You, too, have seen quite a lot during this voyage. But *I'm* going to sail all my life. I shan't just see the coasts, I'll see them change. Suppose they build a resort hotel here. Then I'll certainly bring tourists here from all over the Soviet Union! And over there, across the bay, they may build a factory or a mine."

We walked back to the launch. I thought of Netayev's words. I had always imagined that seamen must love the sea with its gales and all that. But here was a man who loved the coast.

"Or take Kamchatka. What a wonderful region!" Netayev went on. "There I've seen grass grow in the very snow during winter. Near hot springs. Then there's the Ussuri coast. You know, I was in India on board the *Sukhumi* when we ran her from Arkhangelsk to Vladivostok. Well, in the Ussuri Territory Indian trees grow side by side with our own pines. Tigers live there along with deer. And the towns! Ever been in Komsomolsk? Or on Sakhalin? What a rich country! And the Vladivostok bay—have you seen it? The town lies spread out in a sort of amphitheatre and is reflect-

ed in Golden Horn Bay. I wouldn't compare it with Frisco!"

I had never heard modest and taciturn Netayev talk so enthusiastically.

While the ship was sailing out of Harbour Bay I looked at the bare coast, imagining fine multi-storey hotels and, across the bay opposite them, factory chimneys and piers equipped with harbour cranes. All that would come. It was sure to.

The mountains receded and soon merged with the wavy line of the horizon.

The *Sedov* was bound for Arkhangelsk now; she had covered more than nine thousand miles in the course of a single navigation season and run into some of the least accessible regions.

The seamen were talking of home and wives and children. Packing was under way in the cabins.

Autumn gales in the Barents Sea are terrible.

The ship had been rolling for a long time. Seamen sailing in Arctic regions keep close to ice-floes to shelter from heavy seas. But there are no ice-fields in the Barents Sea and hence no such shelter.

The ship seemed to have diminished in size all at once. The seas rose higher than the bridge.

A strong breeze heralded the coming of a gale. There was a sharp drop in the temperature.

I spent a restless night. The berths in the cabins are usually placed athwart the ship, which prevents your falling out of your berth when there is a roll. But I had my quarters in the captain's saloon and slept on a sofa which was not placed that way. The sofa tilted at every list and it was all I could do to keep lying on it. There was no point in trying to steady it with a chair. The chairs were dancing at will about the saloon. Tired of wrestling with them, I had given them up.

The captain dropped in, wearing a drenched oilskin cape. He told me how to sleep in a gale. You must lie on your

stomach, with elbows and legs spread out. I tried it and felt steadier.

A pendulum was swinging on the wall. In a motion unusual for a pendulum, it slowly deviated to one side, then passed across a vertical line and swung to the other side, as if climbing up the wall. It seemed to belong to an extremely slow-going clock. It was an instrument showing the list of the ship.

The roll was amazing; it reached forty-five degrees.

Next morning I went out on deck, utterly exhausted.

The wind whistled furiously. As it was impossible to stand up without holding on to some object, I grasped the hand-rail. It was coated with ice. A layer of ice covered the lids of the chests standing on deck, the railings, the air shafts, and everything else. The masts and tackle, too, were crusted with it. The ice-bound ship lurched heavily from side to side and the water that soused her froze instantly.

It was very cold and I went back to my cabin to put on some warm clothes.

When I came out again I saw a thick rope stretching above deck. I had not noticed it before. Then I realized that it was the aerial covered with ice. No sooner had I thought what a weight hung on the wire than a huge sea struck at the ship's side and drenched me from head to foot. The foam burst against the funnel and there was a tinkle, as of pieces of glass scattering on deck.

I glanced up—the aerial was gone. It had snapped.

I knew only too well what wireless means for a ship. With the loss of the aerial the ship had no ears or voice.

Ivan Guryanovich, the ship's wireless operator, rushed out of the wireless cabin, smart as ever in his jacket, and looked up. He was alarmed.

I walked past the deck superstructure to mount the bridge.

The wind bore down upon me. I clung to the storm rope strung along the deck.

I could make headway only by holding on to the rope. I was soaked through and through before reaching the ladder that led to the bridge. The steps of the ladder sank away under my feet. My body seemed to lose its weight as if I were in a cage falling down a mine shaft.

The captain was not on the bridge. Netayev was on watch. He had an oilskin cape on.

I was surprised at Boris Yefimovich's absence. At times like that he was always on the bridge. Had his trust in his mate gone so far by then? I recalled Netayev's first watch when he and I had just boarded the *Sedov*. The ship was then sailing through ice and the captain, enraged by Netayev's clumsy butt at the ice, was telling him how to steer.

"Hard to starboard! Look sharp!" he had shouted to Netayev in an unusually angry voice.

I looked in at the wheel-house. I knew all the helmsmen by appearance. The seaman at the wheel seemed unfamiliar to me. But the next instant I recognized him. It was the captain. He would trust no one with the wheel and was himself doing the duty of helmsman.

Soon I knew the reason.

The ship would not obey the wheel. To be exact, she hardly obeyed it because the seas kept on tossing her and buffeting at her sides, making her all but stop as her screw spun helplessly up in the air. It took particular skill to handle her just then.

The wireless operator ran up the ladder in a soaked jacket and reported the loss of communication to the captain.

"What a misfortune!" said the captain. "But don't you now take it into your head to climb the tackle in a roll like this."

"But they'll miss us if I don't! They'll think we've sunk. If you'll permit me, Boris Yefimovich—"

"No, I forbid it! They're sure to be worried at headquarters, but I'm not going to risk my seamen's lives. Wait till we're out of rough water."

The crestfallen operator walked away, planting his feet wide apart.

"The tackle's covered with ice and the mast's swaying—just look at it," said the captain to me, as if to justify his decision. "We must get out of this area without a moment's delay."

He was peering ahead, turning the wheel to the right or left all the time.

I walked up to Netayev to be out of the captain's way.

Netayev exchanged a swift glance with me and nodded at the wheel-house. Never in his life had he had a chance to be on watch with a helmsman so skilled that there was no need to tell him what he had to do.

Incidentally, Boris Yefimovich had been an ordinary sailor for many years before the Revolution. The Soviet system had opened navigation school to him and promoted him to the rank of ship's captain.

Suddenly Netayev dashed forward and clutched at the rail.

"Hard to port!" he shouted.

Surprised though he was by the shout, the captain spun the wheel, obeying the order.

"Harder! Quick! Look sharp!" snapped Netayev.

I could see by the captain's figure and his fast-moving hands how hard it was for him to put about the ship, whose screw rose clear of the water every now and again.

I looked to where Netayev's gaze was fixed. Just ahead of the ship's bow I saw a floating mine poised on a wave-crest.

"A mine?" I cried involuntarily. "Out here in the Barents Sea? But how?"

Ball-shaped and bristling with strikers, the mine resembled some monster that had come up to the surface.

"A mine!" shouted Netayev. "Hard to port! Harder! Harder!"

He grabbed the handle of the engine-room telegraph.

"Stop! Full speed astern! Full speed astern! Hard to starboard! Look sharp, damn it! Hard to starboard!"

The mine was at a hairbreadth from the ship's bow. Who knew where it had broken loose from and how long it had been drifting at sea before it got in our way in that heavy gale, at a moment when the ship would not obey the wheel.

The mine passed slightly to the left of the bow. But it was sure to hit the ship's side, it was!

"Full speed astern!" shouted the captain from the wheel-house. "Come on, full speed astern!"

But Netayev had already conveyed the same order to the engine-room.

"Hard to starboard! Hard to starboard now! Snappy!" he commanded in his turn.

A wave threw up the mine, which turned about, its pins standing out like lopped feelers.

"Stop! Full speed ahead!" Netayev commanded, shifting the handle of the engine-room telegraph. "Hard to port!" he shouted to the captain.

The mine glided past close by the ship's side. I rushed to the side railing, bent over it and stared down at the terrible ball, trying to reckon the distance that separated us.

Netayev stood by my side, bending over the railing like me. He took out his handkerchief and mopped his moist forehead.

The mine was already near the ship's stern.

The captain gave the wheel to another helmsman and crossed to us.

Netayev stood at attention. His face flushed.

"Forgive me, Boris Yefimovich—"



"It's all right," said the captain, dismissing the matter with a wave of his hand. "Well done! Where's the wireless operator? Call him. And get the bosun here, he's our best rope climber."

"But how did that mine get here?" I asked.

"The Gulf Stream brought it here from Norwegian or British waters," answered the captain.

The wireless operator instantly appeared before the captain.

"Fix that aerial. I give you fifteen minutes."

"But you didn't permit me, Boris Yefimovich!"

"Climb the mast and fasten the aerial as you like, but it's got to be there. I'm going to climb the shrouds myself."

Netayev stepped in.

"You mustn't, Boris Yefimovich. Please let me climb."

"You've never been under sail, but I have!" snapped the old seaman.

The wireless operator, the captain, the boatswain and several other seamen set about stringing up the aerial. Netayev took up the captain's place at the wheel.

"We must let the mine-sweeper know. She wasn't far from us. She must find the mine and destroy it. Just now we don't need wireless communication for ourselves but for all the other ships, all those who may come across that damned mine at sea. And we've got to have communication!"

The fifty-year-old captain climbed up the ice-coated shrouds with amazing deftness. The mast he clung to was swaying; its top with the little form hugging it described an enormous arc, poising above the seas now on one side of the ship, now on the other.

While Boris Yefimovich and the wireless operator hung on to the frozen tackle, stringing up the aerial wire, Netayev kept the mine in sight.

I forgot about the roll and the cold wind and anxiously watched the seamen's risky work.

At last the captain came down on deck and the wireless operator hurried to the wireless cabin.

"Radio the sweeper to head this way at once, and send the roll to hell!" the captain shouted to him. "And now we must get warm," he said to me in his usual, friendly voice.

As we sat in his cabin he filled his pipe, lighted it, and poured himself a glass of cognac.

After a pull at his pipe he drank his glass off, shut his eyes, opened them, and slowly sent up a curl of smoke, as if showing a trick.

"This is what I call the polarnik way," he said. "Now I must go to the wheel." He mounted the bridge to replace the helmsman.

The mine-sweeper, summoned by wireless, sailed up two hours later. During all that time the *Sedov* had been circling round the dangerous ball which had drifted into the Arctic from foreign seas, as if guarding it. Whenever the ship put about, turning her side to the seas, I thought she was going to capsize. The pendulum showing her list seemed to have gone crazy. The kungas had been swept overboard, but the launch *Petushok* was still there and some sailors were busy securing it.

The little mine-sweeper came up, bobbing on the waves. The captain saluted it with a hoot. He turned over to it the dangerous beast he had come upon.

The *Sedov* resumed her south-westward run. We saw the sweeper astern; it was stealing up to the mine.

Suddenly there was an explosion. A black cloud of smoke rose above the dark seas.

"That takes care of it!" said Boris Yefimovich with relief, spinning the wheel. "How do you feel, Ivan Guryanovich? Have you got warm? Well, then send greetings to the navy men. Thank them on behalf of all Arctic captains."

I looked at the giant tousled rollers that kept on setting upon the ship like racing railway embankments.

I recalled Baranov who had landed his flying boat on the crest of such a roller. I tried to picture it and just then fully appreciated Baranov's feat.

I said that to the captain.

"Baranov!" he said. "Come to my cabin. We can relax a bit now. I'm going to tell you something about him."

We sat in his cabin. Water flowed down the glass of the port-hole every now and then. The captain told me about a far-away coast, an old hunter, and Baranov the flyer.

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## A RACE IN THE ARCTIC NIGHT

**T**he starlit sky foretold frost.

"I've been wasting my time," Fedot Ivanovich Fomin said to himself, looking up at the Great Bear, "and it's well on towards noon. See how that dipper's tilted. It's all right, though, I think I'll make it."

The old hunter whistled to Taimir, a powerful broad-chested husky, and started to put on his skis.

He did not lock the door—some wayfarer might come along. A bundle of flotsam wood washed ashore by the sea lay near the stove. The lamp was filled with paraffin. A frozen bear ham hung conspicuously in the passage, a nice treat for any visitor.

"No fox can open the door, but a man'll find a square meal here," said Fomin aloud.

Taimir looked up with his clever eyes.

Fomin often talked to himself or his dog; it was a habit he had got into during the long years of solitary life after his wife's death. True, he had fine sons, but they had scattered all over the country.

Having fastened his skis, he set out. The snow looked grey in the scanty starlight.

Fomin was looking forward with pleasure to the chat he was going to have with people at the polar station he was bound for. There he might well hear about his sons. He was sure to hear about Alexander, his eldest, for who didn't know Alexander Fomin, the Arctic captain?

On his way Fomin inspected five snares. Splendid foxes had got caught in three of them.

Suddenly there rose a strong wind. Mixing with the prickly snow, it became a compact mass. The stars vanished.

"This isn't a blizzard yet," muttered Fomin. "You can't call it one."

He recalled a blizzard that had nearly cost him his life. Some Chukchi had found him in the snow, frozen and numb, and had warmed him up in their *yaranga*. That had been during his escape to the tundra from exile in Siberia.

Ever since then Fomin had lived as a settler on the coast up in the Far North, a severe region he had come to love dearly.

It was no good returning to his native Tambov Region, as none of his kin were left there. His father had been arrested with him, because they had set fire to the landlord's house together; as for a wife, well, he had had no chance to get married yet. It was in the North that he did it, marrying a Chukcha woman. She had been a good wife to him.

His father had died serving a sentence of hard labour. His own son Ivan was much like his grandfather. If only the old man could have known that his grandson had become an officer! He had only seen tsarist officers, while Ivan was a Soviet officer. Ivan had left for the front as soon as the Patriotic War broke out. He was an excellent hunter and had brought home quite a few silver fox. Nor had he spoiled a single fur; he always hit the fox squarely in the eye. He became a wonderful sharpshooter, did Ivan.

"It looks as if the blizzard's working up into a real one," Fomin interrupted the thread of his thoughts, peering anxiously at the sky.

The wind howled and moaned and roared, trying to knock him down. At some other time he would certainly have

stopped to dig in and sleep a couple of days until the storm had blown over and he could go on; but this time he had much too important business to see to.

He was out on a sixty-mile run to the nearest polar station to take part in electing a deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union. A Chukcha acquaintance of his from a reindeer collective farm had brought him a special invitation as far back as the previous month.

The icy wind made breathing almost impossible. The old man's moustache had frozen together. He could see nothing, not even Taimir. The snow seemed to be roaring around him like the sea in a gale.

"So this is how you, an old hunter, know the tundra, is it?" Fomin reproached himself. "This is what you brag about. See that you don't go wrong in your reckoning! It seems that you'll have to make a halt if you are to get there at all."

With a heavy heart he crawled into his parka as into a sleeping-bag. Taimir lay down near his master.

Trying to keep warm with his own breath, Fomin said to himself, "No matter what happens, Fedot Ivanovich, you must share in the general happiness, together with your country and all your three sons."

He had sent the three of them to the Big Land where they, sons of a hunter and grandsons of a peasant, could study and get on in life. The youngest, Alexei, had become a flyer. His grandfather could hardly have imagined that people would be flying through the air before long.

"I must go on at any cost. I've already wasted so much time," he thought, terrified, as he scrambled out of the snow-drift.

The wind sent the snow racing in waves. They broke against the ground as the surf breaks against the shore. A single wave like that was enough to snow you over from head to foot.

It was not snow alone that chilled Fomin but cold despair as well. Still he plodded on.

"How can I be late on a day like this? What a shame it would be. And I who was thinking of a chat with people!"

But he was forced to halt. Once again he and Taimir dug in. He tried to reckon how many hours he had been going and how many more he had to go to arrive in time. It appeared that he had not a minute to spare.

Luckily the blizzard began to die down. A hard frost set in. Fomin's black beard, in which there was not a single grey hair, grew hoary. He sped on, unaware of the cold. The important thing was to arrive before dusk—before midnight.

The speed with which that dipper up there shifted! Nothing could stop it.

As if vying with Time, the old hunter ran on across the earth, which was racing inexorably from west to east.

In spite of the late hour the polar station was in a bustle. The passengers and crew of an aeroplane that had just arrived from the east crowded in the well-heated, cosy rooms and the spacious mess-room with the station people.

"We'll just fill in. Then on we go!" said Matvei Baranov, a tall, broad-shouldered flyer renowned throughout the Arctic.

"I won't keep you long," said the chief of the polar station. "You know I'm flying with you, but first we've got to open the ballot-boxes and count the votes."

The station chief glanced at his watch. Its hands were creeping up to twelve o'clock.

"You'd say we were celebrating New Year," said someone.

"Why do you stick to form?" Baranov protested. "You're delaying an experimental flight, that's all."

"Wait, Matvei. We're missing a voter. I wonder what it may mean."

"Is that so?" Baranov's tone had at once become grave.

The door banged. The station meteorologist walked into the room and threw off his fur jacket. There was a melancholy look on his lean face with prominent cheek-bones.

"Nobody in sight. I strained my eyes as hard as I could."

"Perhaps he voted at a deer-breeders' camp?"

"Oh, no! He *must* come here. He had an election card issued to him on the deer farm."

"Time's up," the station chief cut in. "Will the members of the commission please—"

"Get the plane ready, mechanic!" Baranov commanded.

The door banged again. The wireless operator ran through the mess-room, waving in the air a draft radiogram on the election returns to be transmitted to the District Electoral Commission.

"Let 'em know we're taking off!" cried Baranov to him, rising from the table. He stretched with all his well-built frame and looked round.

A man covered with snow and hoar-frost stood in the doorway.

"What time is it?" he asked hoarsely.

"Fedot Ivanovich!" exclaimed one of the winterers, rushing to him.

"I'd like to vote." Fomin looked entreatingly at those around him.

There was an exchange of embarrassed glances. As no one answered, Fomin looked around helplessly, then sank heavily down on a chair that someone had offered him and concentrated on breaking icicles out of his beard.

"You're just a bit late, Fedot Ivanovich," said the meteorologist, "a matter of a few minutes. We'd been waiting for you so."

The station chief came in with a sheet of paper in his hand and stopped dead in his tracks.

"You here?" he cried, as though he would not believe his own eyes.



Fomin bent his head lower. Water was dripping from his thawing beard.

Nobody tried to comfort the old man. The general silence suggested understanding and sympathy.

Fomin raised his head.

"So I'm late. Yes, you can't catch up with yesterday. No river turns back." He paused.

Baranov cleared his throat.

"I think you're wrong, Fedot Ivanovich."

The old man smiled bitterly.

"Sure I'm wrong, because I missed it."

Baranov glanced at the clock, then at the door.

"We'll make rivers turn back," he said confidently. "The Yenisei as well as the Ob. There's a plan like that, Fedot Ivanovich, a people's plan. Those rivers are going to run into south seas."

The old man shook his head incredulously.

"Joking, aren't you, son."

"No, Fedot Ivanovich. Do you want to catch up with yesterday and grab it by the tail?"

"Just how?"

"This is how. You listen to me till the mechanic comes back. The earth turns from west to east. On this parallel here, the seventieth, it rotates at three hundred and seventy miles an hour."

"So. What are you driving at?"

"Now consider it. If we flew at the same speed the other way, the sun would kind of stand still, wouldn't it?"

"I suppose it would."

"But what if we flew faster than that? What if we overtook the earth? Then the sun which had set would start rising in the west. See?"

"Well?"

"Now my plane, Fedot Ivanovich, flies faster than the earth goes round. So try to imagine what would happen if you flew in it." Baranov winked slyly at the old man.

"Time would move backwards for you!" cried the wireless operator.

"So it would," said the station chief. "They'd land in Arkhangelsk at eleven p. m. while here it's already past midnight. I give up my seat to Fomin!"

Fomin stood perplexed in the middle of the room. The air mechanic came in.

"And now, Fedot Ivanovich, let's hurry to the plane," Baranov said in his booming voice. "Every minute counts!"

"Hurry? I can do that. I've been hurrying all the way here. Only tell me again."

They went.

"That's right, the old man'll vote in Arkhangelsk!" said the meteorologist, slapping the table.

The door opened. A black beard was thrust in for a second.

"Please take care of Taimir. He's all right."

The door slammed shut.

"Don't worry, Fedot Ivanovich!" shouted the station chief as he put on his overcoat to fetch the dog.

Those left in the room walked over to the window. A dog was barking far away. Suddenly an avalanche of stone seemed to crash down from above and a sustained peal of thunder came from outside, so out of place in that frosty Arctic night.

The jet engines of Baranov's powerful craft were roaring.

"Are we really going to fly?" asked Fomin.

The pilot nodded. He was tracing the route on a chart. A luminescent clock hung on the wall in front of him. It did not show past midnight but a little past four p.m. That meant that the previous day had not yet elapsed.

"This is Arkhangelsk time!" cried Baranov.

"Can we make it?" thought Fomin.

Nothing could be seen through the window but the stars, among which the famous Dipper—the old hunter's clock hand—stood out.

The engines were roaring at a steady pitch and time was wearing on. To be exact, it was the pilot's time that was wearing on, while Fomin's star clock stood still. In fact, the hand of that clock had moved back.

Baranov's clock showed eleven p.m. and so did the Great Bear.

The aeroplane came down for landing. There was a jolt, the craft stopped. In the companion-way appeared the sturdy frame of Baranov who had defeated Time.

Arkhangelsk! We approached it on November 1. I was standing on the bridge by the captain's side. Dusk was falling, the weather was calm, and Boris Yefimovich was steering the ship up the Maimaxa, an arm of the Northern Dvina.

He had been a pilot during the war and did not have to ask Arkhangelsk for help. He himself came of an old pilot family, in which the trade passed down from generation to generation.

I had not realized till then that the *Sedov* was a big sea-going ship. She rose majestically above the houses along the banks.

Cleaning was nearly finished aboard. The ship was being tidied up. Not a trace was left of the ice coating of the day before.

All the launches and river boats going the other way saluted the ship.

A glorious ship! She was putting into her home port after unobtrusively performing many feats, establishing unprecedented records, and ensuring the further functioning of distant polar stations.

The ship cast anchor in the roads facing the piers flooded with light. A launch came alongside. It was time to say good-bye.

I hugged my friends.

“Good-bye, seamen! Good-bye, *Georgy Sedov*!”

The launch pulled away. The storm ladder—so familiar to me and so hard to climb the first time—hung down the ship’s side.

The *Sedov* gave a farewell hoot. It must have been Boris Yefimovich’s idea. He and Netayev were standing on the bridge where their friendship had started and grown—friendship between two Soviet seamen. I once more waved good-bye to all the seamen and polarniks whom I had come to know in the course of that routine voyage—to those Arctic heroes who least of all suspect that they may be considered heroes.

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I flew above tundra and ice-fields, sailed Arctic seas, visited numerous islands and regions north of the Polar Circle, and met common people of the Soviet Arctic, peaceful winterers and seamen, flyers and geologists—people modest and courageous. Like Jack London's characters they live and work in the romantic North. But what a vast difference between them and our Soviet people! It occurred to me to tell the story of what I had seen and heard, the story of just one voyage, a routine voyage of the *Sedov*.

That was how my first short stories came into being. *Against the Wind* is not a novel—it is a collection of sketches about people of today, about the workaday exploits of "Arctic heroes who least of all suspect that they may be considered heroes."

*Alexander Kazantsev*

